**Virginia: AD 1607-1644**

In 1606 James I supports new English efforts (the first since [**Raleigh**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iii#iii)) to establish colonies along the coast of America, north of the Spanish-held territory in Florida. A charter for the southern section is given to a company of London merchants (called the London Company, until its successful colony causes it be known as the Virginia Company). A company based in Plymouth is granted a similar charter for the northern part of this long coastline, which as yet has no European settlers.

The Plymouth Company achieves little (and has no connection with the[**Pilgrim Fathers**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=itu#itu)who establish a new Plymouth in America in 1620). The London Company succeeds in planting the first permanent English settlement overseas - but only after the most appalling difficulties.

In April 1607 three ships sent out by the London Company sail into Chesapeake Bay. They continue up a broad waterway, which they name the James river in honour of their king, and a few weeks later they select an island to settle on. They call their settlement Jamestown. But to the territory itself they give a more romantic name, honouring England's late[**virgin queen**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=hvq#hvq) - Virginia.

More than 100 English settlers attempt to make their home in 1607 on the island of Jamestown. A year later disease, privation, hunger and [**attacks**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iuh#iuh) by local Indians have reduced their number to less than forty. But the hardship has produced the first notable leader in British colonial history.

John Smith is one of seven men appointed by the London company to serve on the colony's council. His energy, his resourcefulness and his skill in negotiating with the Indians soon establish him as the leader of the community.

Smith soon becomes involved in a famously romantic scene (or so he claims many years later, in a book of 1624). He is captured by Indians and is about to be executed when[**Pocahontas**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=122), the 13-year-old daughter of the tribal chieftain, throws herself between victim and executioner (or so Smith maintains). Smith is initiated into the tribe and returns to Jamestown - where Pocahontas becomes a frequent visitor, often bringing valuable information about the Indians' intentions.

Four more ships reach Jamestown in 1609. The number of settlers is up to 500 when Smith is injured, later that year, and has to sail home to England. During the next winter, in his absence, there is appalling famine - the 500 are reduced to 60. They are joined by another group (survivors of a shipwreck in[**Bermuda**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=130)), but only after further reinforcements arrive, in 1610, is it finally decided to persevere with this difficult attempt at colonization.

The town of Williamsburg, first called Middle Plantation, is founded in 1633. By mid-century (in spite of an Indian attack in 1644 which kills 500 colonists) Virginia is at last secure. Ten or more counties, on the English pattern, have their own sheriff, constable and justices.

**Pilgrim Fathers: AD 1620-1621**

The most famous boatload of immigrants in north American history leaves Plymouth in September 1620. Thirty-five of about 102 passengers in the *Mayflower* have sailed once before from England to live according to their Christian consciences in a freer land. They were part of a Puritan group which moved in 1608 from Boston in Lincolnshire to[**Holland**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ifn#ifn), famous at the time for religious toleration. Now, in spite of the dangers involved, they want to be even more free in a place of their own.

Their sights are set on New England, the coast of which has been explored in 1614 by [**John Smith**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iil#iil), the leader of the Jamestown settlers. His book *A Description of New England*, naming and describing the region, has been published in 1616.

The journey lasts eight weeks before they make their first landfall, on the tip of Cape Cod. It is not until mid-December that the little group selects a coastal site suitable for their village. They name it Plymouth, echoing their port of departure from the old world. To their surprise there appear to be no[**Indians**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iuj#iuj) in the vicinity.

New England winters are notoriously severe and the pilgrims have, in a phrase of the time, 'all things to doe, as in the beginning of the world'. Only half the group survive that first winter and spring. Of eighteen married women, just five are alive when the first harvest is reaped in 1621.

The survivors thank the Lord for nature's bounty in the ceremony of[**Thanksgiving**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=155), with the local Indians sharing in this first annual celebration. A large indigenous fowl, the [**turkey**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=bow#bow), makes an admirable centrepiece. The settlers have found it living wild in the forests of New England.

These pioneering families become known to their contemporaries as the Old Comers (they are first referred to as Pilgrim Fathers in 1799, and are more often known now in the USA simply as the Pilgrims). The ritual of Thanksgiving is not the only great tradition which the pilgrims bequeath to modern America. Their example of self-reliance becomes a central strand in the American ideal. It will be fully maintained by other English communities establishing themselves, just ten years later, further north in Massachusetts.

**Massachussetts and New England: AD 1629-1691**

The success of the[**Plymouth**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=itu#itu) settlers soon causes other Puritans to follow their example. The situation at home adds a further incentive. England is undergoing a recession; and William [**Laud**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iit#iit)(bishop of London from 1628, archbishop of Canterbury from 1633) is trying to impose the episcopalian form of Christianity on the country by force. Economics and conscience pull in the same direction. America beckons.

In 1629 a Puritan group secures from the king a charter to trade with America, as the Massachusetts Bay Company. Led by John Winthrop, a fleet of eleven vessels sets sail for Massachusetts in 1630. The ships carry 700 settlers, 240 cows and 60 horses.

Winthrop also has on board the royal charter of the company. The enterprise is to be based in the new world rather than in London. This device is used to justify a claim later passionately maintained by the new colony - that it is an independent political entity, entirely responsible for its own affairs.In 1630 Winthrop selects Boston as the site of the first settement, and two years later the town is formally declared to be the capital of the colony.

This concept chimes well with the settlers' religious attitudes. They are[**Congregationalists**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ijz#ijz), committed to the notion that the members of each church are a self-governing body. The towns of Massachusetts become like tiny[**city-states**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=cem#cem) - each with a church at its centre, and with the church members as the governors.

This is [**oligarchy**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=chy#chy)rather than democracy, but it is an oligarchy based on perceived virtue rather than wealth or birth. All male church members have a vote. But a man may only become a church member on the invitation of those already enjoying this exalted status. Since God's approval is not to be devalued, his elect remain a minority in each community.

The Massachusetts system proves an extremely efficient way of settling new territory. A community, granted a tract of land by Winthrop and his governing body in Boston, immediately becomes responsible for making a success of the new enterprise - building a church and houses while bringing the surrounding land into cultivation.

Standards of education and literacy are high in the colony (the university of Harvard is founded as early as 1636). The appeal of Massachusetts proves so great that in the first eleven years, to 1640, some 20,000 settlers arrive from England.

In subsequent decades, as the population grows and colonization extends further afield, regions evolve into separate colonies. Connecticut emerges in 1662, and New Hampshire in 1679. In a reverse process, the original settlement of[**Plymouth**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=itu#itu) becomes absorbed within Massachusetts in 1691. (Vermont and Maine remain part of Massachusetts until 1791 and 1820 respectively).

Rhode Island is an exception within New England, going its own way very early (from 1636) because of the religious intolerance in self-righteous Massachusetts. It is founded by Roger Williams, a clergyman banished by the Boston authorities for his radical views.

Williams establishes the town of Providence on land which he buys from the Indians (itself a novelty among English settlers). He welcomes persecuted sects, such as[**Anabaptists**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=hnx#hnx) and[**Quakers**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ioj#ioj), and turns Rhode Island into a haven of tolerance. In this respect the small colony prefigures[**Pennsylvania**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ivc#ivc). But meanwhile New England's immediate neighbour to the south and west attracts English attention. This region is being colonized by the Dutch.

**Dutch in America: AD 1624-1664**

In 1621 the States General in the Netherlands grant a charter to the Dutch West India Company, giving it a monopoly to trade and found colonies along the entire length of the American coast. The area of the [**Hudson**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=hcg#hcg)river, explored by Hudson for the Dutch East India Company in 1609, has already been designated New Netherland. Now, in 1624, a party of thirty families is sent out to establish a colony. They make their first permanent settlement at Albany, calling it Fort Orange.

In 1626 Peter Minuit is appointed governor of the small colony. He purchases the island of Manhattan from Indian chiefs, and builds a fort at its lower end. He names the place New Amsterdam.

The Dutch company finds it easier to make money by piracy than by the efforts of colonists (the capture of the[**Spanish silver**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=heh#heh) fleet off Cuba in 1628 yields vast profits), but the town of New Amsterdam thrives as an exceptionally well placed seaport - even though administered in a harshly authoritarian manner by a succession of Dutch governors.

The only weakness of New Amsterdam is that it is surrounded by English colonies to the north and south of it. This place seems to the English both an anomaly and an extremely desirable possession. Both themes are reflected in the blithe grant by Charles II in 1664 to his brother, the duke of York, of the entire coastline between the Connecticut and Delaware rivers.

New Amsterdam, and in its hinterland New Netherland, lie exactly in the middle of this stretch. When an English fleet arrives in 1664, the Dutch governor Peter Stuyvesant accepts the reality of the situation and surrenders the territory without a shot being fired. Thus New Amsterdam becomes British and two years later, at the end of hostilities between Britain and the Netherlands, is renamed New York. The town has at the time about 1500 inhabitants, with a total population of perhaps 7000 Europeans in the whole region of New Netherland - which now becomes the British colony of New York.

The Dutch have recently begun to settle the coastal regions further south, which the British now also appropriate as falling within the region given by Charles II to the duke of York. It becomes the colony of New Jersey.

**Proprietary colonies: AD 1632-1732**

The granting of[**New York and New Jersey**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=hseb#hseb) by Charles II to his brother, in 1664, is typical of the way British colonies are founded along the American coast south of New England. Whereas the [**New England colonies**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=itw#itw) are in the hands of independent Puritan communities, creating their own future as small farmers in a relatively harsh environment, the southern colonies are given by the British monarch to powerful aristocrats under whose protection settlers are shipped across the Atlantic.

The first such grant is that of Maryland to Lord Baltimore in 1632. Baltimore's concern is to establish a haven for English Roman Catholics, of whom the first shipload arrives in the colony in 1634.

The next grant is that of Carolina, given to a consortium of eight proprietors in 1670. The two parts, north and south, develop rather differently. In the south, where rice proves a profitable crop, large plantations are established using negro [**slave labour**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=gpsa#gpsa). The north, relying more on tobacco grown in small holdings, is less prosperous. (The most famous product of the region, cotton, must await Eli Whitney's invention of the[**Cotton gin**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=255).) The north becomes a separate colony in 1712, introducing the lasting division between North and South Carolina.

The last of these proprietary colonies is Georgia, granted in 1732 to a group of British philanthropists. Their aim is to give a new start in life to debtors and to others with no means of support.

The philanthropic trustees impose various idealistic restrictions - no alcohol, no large estates, no slaves - which initially prevent Georgia from becoming as prosperous as its northern neighbours (though the new colony fulfils from the start a useful subsidiary role, as a buffer zone beween British America and the Spanish colony of [**Florida**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=hep#hep) to the south).

While restrictive idealism holds Georgia back, a different sort of idealism has made the most interesting of the proprietary colonies extremely prosperous. Pennsylvania, granted to William Penn in 1681, is founded on the principle of freedom of conscience. Its capital, Philadelphia, soon becomes the leading city of British America.

**Pennsylvania: AD 1681-1737**

William Penn is a well-connected young man in England when he profoundly shocks his father, a friend of Charles II, by landing in gaol in 1667 for attending a [**Quaker**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ioj#ioj) meeting. In this radical Christian group the young Penn finds a lifelong commitment to the cause of religious liberty. He is able to turn his ideals into practice thanks to a loan of £16,000 which his father has made to the king. After the elder Penn's death, the son accepts the grant of a tract of land in America, in 1681, in discharge of the royal debt.

Penn names the new colony Pennsylvania (Penn's woodlands, in honour of his father) and sets about putting into effect what he calls a 'holy experiment'.

Colonists settling in Pennsylvania are expected to believe in one God, the creator of the universe, but that is the limit of religious conformity required. This is to be a community based on the gentle ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. Its main city is named by Penn in accordance with this ideal; it is to be Philadelphia, Greek for 'brotherly love'.

Penn has travelled much in Europe, making contact with other persecuted Christian minorities - in particular[**Anabaptist**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=hny#hny) groups in Germany. They too flock to his colony, forming a significant and early German presence in British America. They are the group known now as the Pennysylvania Dutch (from*deutsch*, meaning German).

Penn's profound tolerance and common sense is evident when a woman is brought before him in Philadelphia in 1682 on a charge of witchcraft. He asks her whether she has ridden through the air on a broomstick. There must have been a gasp in the court when she answers 'Yes'. Penn's reply is that if she is able to do this, he knows of no law against it. He recommends that she be set free. The jury agrees. No more is heard of witchcraft in Pennsylvania but ten years later, in 1692, some thirty people are executed in Salem on the same preposterous charge (see[**Witches of Salem**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=003)).

Applying the same high but easy-going principles, Penn is the early colonial leader who has the greatest success in his relationship with the American Indians.

In a series of meetings with the local Lenape tribes, in 1682-4, Penn achieves mutual trust in agreements unrecorded in formal treaties. His meeting with the Indians at Shackamaxon (made famous by Benjamin West's painting of the*Great Treaty*) is pure legend but nevertheless contains the essence of a historical reality. This is true also of the treaty by which the Lenape (referrred to by Europeans at the time as Delaware Indians) cede to Penn as much land, between rivers west of a certain creek, as can be walked in a day and a half.

Penn never measures this distance, but his grasping successors do - half a century later - in a notorious example of British betrayal of the Indians.
 In 1737 the colony of Pennsylvania decides to claim the full extent of this supposed agreement. Athletes are trained for the occasion; a path is cut through the scrub; on August 25-6 the quickest among them covers sixty-four miles in the day and a half, bringing some 1200 square miles of Indian territory securely into British hands.

There is a further irony attached to this loss by the Lenape. When they reject the so-called Walking Purchase, both sides agree to accept arbitration by the [**Iroquois League**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=158). This confederation of powerful Indian tribes gives judgement in favour of the British. Their cooperation is part of a long-standing alliance between the Iroquois and the colonists.

**Albany and the Iroquois: AD 1689-1754**

Representatives of the [**Iroquois League**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=158) are present at a gathering in Albany in 1689 which is one of the first joint assemblies of English colonies. Delegates from New York, Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth and Connecticut discuss with the Iroquois a plan for mutual defence.

The Iroquois are again present at the much more significant Albany Congress of 1754. On this occasion the topic is a very specific threat of war. Even while they talk, George Washington is skirmishing with French troops in the Ohio valley. It is the opening engagement in what becomes known as the[**French and Indian War**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=alp#alp).

Each European side is eager to secure the support of its traditional Indian allies. The Iroquois are particularly important as they control the Appalachian mountains which separate the British colonies from the Ohio valley.

There are 150 Indian representatives at the congress, negotiating with twenty-five commissioners from the colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire. The Iroquois are sent away with presents and with promises (later disregarded) that English settlers will not encroach on their lands. In the event Iroquois support for the English is not solid in the coming conflict, but this does not affect the outcome.

The Albany Congress wins a secure place in history not for the Iroquois involvement but because a first proposal is made for some degree of political union among the British colonies.

One of the delegates, Benjamin Franklin, points out an anomaly. The six nations of the Iroquois can make a confederacy work to their mutual advantage. In striking contrast, the thirteen British colonies have failed to achieve any practical degree of cooperation. He puts forward a plan for a union (already proposed more than half a century previously, by William Penn, in a document of 1696). Franklin supports his argument with America's [**first political cartoon**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ali#ali).

**Franklin's plan: AD 1754**

Franklin argues that the British colonies must unite if they are to survive against the French. He suggests a colonial government, made up of representatives from each of the colonies under the leadership of a president general appointed by the British king.

Such a body, as imagined by Franklin, will have the power to negotiate with the Indians. It will be allowed to raise troops and build forts to protect British America. And to pay for this programme, it will have the right to levy [**taxes on the colonists**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=jap#jap). Taxation with representation, unlike the troubles a few years ahead.

In his newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Franklin publishes a cartoon which makes the point very powerfully. He selects a creature which is undoubtedly more powerful in one piece than in several. The parts of his snake are labelled with the names of colonies, at this time as separate as in the image - South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and, under a single head, the colonies of New England.

The message 'Join, or Die' is one which Franklin is credited with having repeated, in a different and more darkly humorous form, at the signing of the [**Declaration of Independence**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=alm#alm) in 1776.

Franklin's scheme is accepted by the[**Albany Congress**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iut#iut), but nothing comes of it. The colonies have not yet found the will to co-operate to this extent. And parliament in London has no wish to devolve its powers in this way to such an offspring. But Franklin's proposal is the first suggestion of the type of federal system for the British colonies which will be adopted, twenty-three years later, in the [**constitution**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=jcc#jcc) of the United States.

Meanwhile, in the year of the Albany Congress, the war has begun which will add greatly to the extent of Britain's colonies in north America. The[**French and Indian War**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=aln#aln) starts badly for Britain. But by 1758 things are improving.

**Mounting antagonism: AD 1763-1773**

If the results of the wars against France leave the British colonists in America with a new sense of confidence, they also make parliament in London increasingly aware both of the value of the American colonies and of the likely cost of defending them.

British America now consists of the thirteen colonies founded or developed by Britain between 1607 ([**Virginia**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iik#iik)) and 1732 ([**Georgia**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iva#iva)), together with four provinces won through warfare -[**Nova Scotia**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ivu#ivu) in 1713, and then Quebec and West and East [**Florida in 1763**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iwp#iwp).

The British government feels that this important bloc of overseas territory now requires more coherent control and better defence - both to be supplied from London. But many in the original thirteen colonies are beginning to regard any such interference as an intrusion.

This difference in attitude leads inevitably to friction. London, sending over British troops (known from their uniform as redcoats), expects the colonists to contribute to the expense and to allow the soldiers to be quartered in American homes. The colonists see this as an unacceptable imposition, in both financial and personal terms.

Similar resentment results from British measures to control the judges and courts in America, to lessen the power of the elected assemblies in each colony, and to collect more effectively the customs due on trade between the American mainland and the West Indies.

But it is British taxes which provoke the most deeply felt grievances and the most effective American response. Between 1764 and 1767 London passes a series of taxes on goods imported into America: the Sugar Act of 1764 (covering wine and textiles as well as sugar), the Stamp Act of 1765 (a stamp duty on legal documents and newspapers), and the Townshend Acts of 1767 (taxes on glass, lead, paper, paint and tea). In retaliation the colonists organize very effective boycotts of British goods.

The boycotts affect British commercial interests in London, where several politicians (in particular William Pitt and Edmund Burke) are anyway inclined to find an accomodation with the colonists. The Stamp Act is repealed in 1766. Similarly the new import duties are lifted in 1770, with one exception - the duty on tea.

This exception is seen as London's emphasis on the right of parliament to tax the American colonies. Yet the colonists have no elected voice in the Westminster assembly. 'No taxation without representation' is a central theme in the colonial argument, and tea now becomes a symbolic substance at the heart of the conflict. A new Tea Act, in 1773, heightens the tension.

**Boston Tea Party: AD 1773**

Early in December 1773 three [**East India Company**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=hkl#hkl)ships are in Boston harbour, waiting for their cargo of tea to be unloaded. No one will take it off the ship, because it will pay British duty as soon as it is transferred to American soil. However, if it is still in the harbour on December 17, the cargo can be legally seized by the British customs and sold.

At a mass meeting in Boston on the evening of December 16 the question is pointedly raised: 'Who knows how tea will mingle with salt water?' Soon some Bostonians appear, roughly disguised as Indians. With the 'Indians' in the lead, the crowd marches to the harbour, boards the ships, and throws some 350 chests of tea into the water.

The night ends with a triumphal march through Boston to the accompaniment of fife and drum. The exciting news spreads rapidly through the colonies, but it takes more than a month for details to reach London of this direct act of defiance. The response of the prime minister, Lord North, is that the time for conciliation has passed. As an example to the other colonies, Boston must be brought to heel.

A succession of acts are passed in London during the summer of 1774. Known officially as the Coercive Acts (but in America as the Intolerable Acts), their purpose is to punish Boston - at the very least until compensation for the tea is paid to the East India Company.

The first of these parliamentary acts closes Boston's port. Subsequent ones place the city under the military command of General Thomas Gage and provide new arrangements for the quartering of troops. It is a policy which can only inflame the situation.

In colony after colony during 1774 provincial assemblies voice their support for Boston, bringing them into direct conflict with their own British governors - who in some cases use their powers to dissolve the assemblies. As a result a new idea gains rapid and excited support. Each colony is invited to send delegates to a congress in Philadelphia in September. Only Georgia hangs back from this next act of defiance.

**First Continental Congress: AD 1774**

Fifty-six delegates from twelve colonies convene in Philadelphia. They are leaders of their own communities (George Washington is here for Virginia). Their voices will carry weight, and the message that they send to Britain is uncompromising.

They state that the recent measures passed into law at Westminster violate natural rights (a theme developed two years later in the[**Declaration of Independence**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=jbh#jbh)) and that as such they are unconstitutional. They declare their united support for Massachusetts. In more practical terms they announce a joint boycott, from December, of all imported goods from Britain and the British West Indies. It is to be followed nine months later by a similar block on exports to those markets from America.

The delegates agree to reconvene in May 1775, but it is clear that the Congress has made war probable. This is welcome news to half the American colonists, who become known as the Patriots. Those who still hope to find an accomodation with Britain (perhaps 25% of the population) acquire the name of Loyalists.

The Patriots spend the winter in preparation, and events soon prove they are right to do so. An exasperated parliament in London decides that more forceful measures are needed. General Gage, commanding the redcoats in Boston, is sent an order to employ his troops more forcefully. He decides to make a surprise raid on the Patriots' stock of military supplies in Massachusetts.

**Lexington and Concord: AD 1775**

The target of General Gage's supposedly secret foray is a store of weapons held at Concord, twenty miles northwest of Boston. But the secret leaks out. When a force of 700 redcoats moves from the city, a horseman gallops from Boston to warn the local Patriots of their approach.

Popular tradition has long identified the horseman as the distinguished[**Huguenot**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ihr#ihr)silversmith Paul Revere. The tradition may well be correct. Revere, one of the 'Indians' taking part in the Tea Party of 1773, often rides with urgent messages from Boston's Committee of Public Safety.

On April 19 the redcoats reach Lexington, on the road to Concord. They find some seventy-five minutemen (the local name for volunteers ready to mobilize at a moment's notice) waiting to oppose their passage. It is not known who fires the first shot - later immortalized by Ralph Waldo Emerson as 'the shot heard round the world'. But after a brief engagement eight minutemen are dead and ten wounded.

The British contingent marches on to Concord, only to find that all the weapons have been removed. Meanwhile the Massachusetts militia has assembled in force. The redcoats suffer heavily from snipers on the journey back to Boston. The American Revolution, also known as the War of American Independence, has begun.

**Second Continental Congress: AD 1775**

When the delegates of the continental congress reconvene as planned, in May 1775, hostilities have already broken out in the skirmish at Lexington. These are followed by a great mustering of militiamen of Massachusetts, soon joined by supporters from neighbouring colonies.

This American volunteer army is laying siege to British-held Boston when the delegates assemble in Philadelphia. These events transform their congress into a de facto government of the united colonies, with responsibility for conducting the military campaign. Their first duty is to select a commander-in-chief of the colonial army, to take charge of the campaign at Boston.

On June 15, after much preliminary negotiation, the choice falls on George Washington. He has his own past military successes to recommend him, but his selection also fulfils a political necessity in that he comes from the south. The present quarrel involves the most populous and prosperous northern colony, Massachusetts. Virginia has the same status among the southern colonies.

If north and south are to cooperate in a shared cause, it is appropriate that a southern general commands the northern militia (formally adopted by the congress on May 31 as the Continental Army). Within a few days of his appointment, Washington travels north to take up his post.

**Bunker Hill and Dorchester Heights: AD 1775-1776**

Two weeks before Washington reaches Boston, an important engagement has taken place on Bunker Hill (or more accurately Breed's Hill) - a height overlooking the city from the north. Colonial troops occupy and fortify this vantage point, constituting a threat to the British in the city.

On June 17 the British storm the hill. They eventually succeed in taking it, but only after a battle so hard fought (some 1000 British casualties to only about 450 American) that it seems a victory for the amateur colonial militia rather than the British regulars. Certainly Washington is impressed by the spirit of the men he has come to command.

Washington spends the rest of 1775 training his troops, who number some 20,000. He also arranges for the transport, over difficult roads, of cannon captured by the colonists when they seize Fort Ticonderoga in a surprise attack in May 1775. On the first day of 1776 Washington flies for the first time a new colonial flag. With thirteen alternating red and white stripes, one for each of the colonies, the design evolves a year later into the[**Stars and Stripes**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=164).

To the south of Boston, overlooking the harbour, there is a promontory - Dorchester Heights - which has been inexplicably left undefended by the British. During the night of 4 March 1776 Washington moves his Ticonderoga cannon up the slopes of this hill.

From his commanding position Washington can now make the harbour unsafe for British naval vessels. The move proves decisive. On March 17 the British in Boston (by now under the command of William Howe) evacuate the city and sail to safety in Nova Scotia. They leave in the city two hundred cannon and large numbers of muskets with their ammunition - valuable additions to the American arsenal.

Washington, anticipating that New York is the next likely target for a British assault, marches to its defence. After settling his army in Manhattan and on Brooklyn Heights, he continues south to spend two weeks at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The subject under discussion is a contentious one - independence.

**Steps to independence: AD 1775-1776**

During the eleven-month siege of Boston there have been significant political developments on the wider stage. Hopes that parliament in Britain might adopt a more conciliatory tone are dashed by the declaration in August 1775 that the American colonies are in a state of rebellion. This is followed by a Prohibitory Act in November instituting a naval blockade of the American coastline.

Meanwhile the congress in Philadelphia is still in session. It is carrying out the practical activities associated with government - organizing public finances, issuing money, running a postal service, placing orders for munitions, even commissioning the first colonial navy.

Increasingly, during these months, colonists are coming to the view that a complete break from Britain may be the only way forward. In May 1776 the revolutionary convention of Virginia votes for independence and instructs the Virginia delegation to present this motion to the Continental Congress. Early in June, in Philadelphia, a small committee is set up to draft a declaration of independence. Its five members include Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. The task of composing the document is left to Jefferson. It is passed on June 12 as the Virginia Declaration of Rights.

This powerful move towards independence comes to a head in early July. In the month between July 2 and August 2 the final break is proposed, proclaimed and eventually signed as the Declaration of Independence.

**Declaration of Independence: AD 1776**

The real date of American independence from Britain is 2 July 1776 - the day on which Virginia's resolution is put to the congress of thirteen colonies and is passed 'unanimously' (though New York in fact abstains). The resolution states uncompromisingly: '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.'

Jefferson's document is already to hand, expressing this stark political fact in more philosophical terms. It is presented to the congress two days later.

In his Declaration of Independence Jefferson affirms political theories which have been current since Locke argued (in support of the[**Revolution of 1688**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=iln#iln)) that the legitimacy of government is based on the consent of the governed. In Jefferson's resounding words: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness' and that 'to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed'.

Congress accepts this document on July 4. Its inspirational quality rightly makes that the date of America's Independence Day.

On July 9 the text of the Declaration of Independence is declaimed in public before George Washington's army, now defending New York. Taking this as the necessary act of public proclamation, the congress orders on July 19 that an appropriate document shall now be prepared. The text begins to be written on a large piece of parchment.

By August 2 it is ready to be signed. The signing is fairly haphazard. Those who happen to be at the congress on that day sign it, though several of them were not present when it was voted through on July 4. Signatures of absent delegates continue to be added into 1777.

The first to sign the Declaration is John Hancock (causing his name later to become a slang term for a signature). While the delegates sign, Benjamin Franklin makes a famous observation - as alarmingly true as it is witty. He points out that they are putting their names to a document which, if they lose the war, will be deemed highly seditious. 'We must indeed all hang together,' says Franklin. 'Or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately'.

Within a few months of Franklin's remark the prospects look very bleak indeed. George Washington loses New York to the British and retreats towards Philadelphia with a severely depleted army.

**New York, Philadelphia and Saratoga: AD 1776-1777**

George Washington's defence of New York in 1776 and subsequently of Philadelphia in 1777 do not rank among his successes. In a series of engagements between August and November 1776 he is driven first from Long Island and then from Manhattan Island with heavy losses of men (mainly captured rather than killed).

On his retreat southwards in midwinter, with an army of only about 6000, he achieves two psychologically important victories by surprise attacks on isolated sections of the British army at Trenton and then at Princeton. These successes raise the colonial morale, and help Washington to recruit more forces. But they are followed by a further disaster in 1777.

Philadelphia, as the first city of America and the seat of the Continental Congress, has great symbolic importance. Intent on capturing it, Howe brings his army down from New York by sea in the summer of 1777, landing them at the head of Chesapeake Bay. Washington attempts to block their progress to Philadelphia but is severely defeated in a battle at Brandywine (in which the 20-year-old[**Lafayette**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=233) fights bravely and is wounded, marking the first appearance of the hero of two revolutions). The congress delegates make a hurried escape from Philadelphia, which the British enter in triumph in September.

Yet the triumph proves hollow. In the same month another British army, under John Burgoyne, is in trouble north of Albany.

Burgoyne has made a difficult march south from Quebec as part of a strategy to join up with Howe, moving north from New York. The plan is to isolate the New England colonies. But Howe has instead gone south to Philadelphia. Burgoyne is unsupported, short of food and ammunition. After defeat in two battles near Saratoga, in September and October 1777, he surrenders to a larger American force under Horatio Gates.

Less than 6000 men are involved, but the propaganda benefit to the colonial cause is incalculable. Indeed Saratoga can be seen as the turning point in the war. The surrender of an entire British army to rebellious colonists attracts the serious attention of a nation with no love for Britain. France begins to negotiate an American alliance.

**The international phase: AD 1778-1781**

A French treaty with the colonists is agreed in February 1778 and two months later a large French fleet sails for America. In the following year, in the established tradition of Bourbon [**family compacts**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=ixw#ixw), France persuades a reluctant Spain to join the fray (as the major colonial power in America, Spain is understandably wary of taking up arms on behalf of rebels).

These developments transform the war between Britain and the colonists. Up to this point the British have been able to ship troops and supplies across the Atlantic with no obstacle other than the elements. Now there are hostile French and Spanish fleets to contend with.

There is even the unexpected affront of warships from the infant American navy sailing from French ports to carry out raids on the coastal regions of Britain. The first American naval hero, John Paul Jones, makes successful sorties in the spring of 1778 and the autumn of 1779, seizing British vessels and launching sudden raids inland. The second voyage ends with the dramatic encounter between the[***Bonhomme Richard***](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=165) and the*Serapis* off Flamborough Head.

But the new French alliance has its greatest effect on military strategy in America. The main strategic aim of both sides, from 1778 to the end of the war, is to ensure that armies are well placed to receive naval support.

The first dramatic example of this is the sudden British departure from Philadelphia in 1778. Advance news of the expected arrival of the French fleet in the Chesapeake is enough to terrify the British, facing the possible prospect of being cut off in hostile territory without any source of supplies. They leave the city and march northeast to greater safety in New York.

This setback, combined with stalemate in the northern colonies, prompts a new British strategy - that of moving troops south by sea to attack the weaker southern colonies. But, after some striking initial successes, this is the campaign which eventually loses the war for Britain.

In December 1778 a British expeditionary force of 3500 men from New York lands in Georgia and captures Savannah. During 1779 the British win control of the whole of Georgia. In 1780, after shipping more troops to the region, they move into South Carolina. Charleston is taken in May 1780, and some 5000 American troops are captured in the city, after a siege of more than a month by both land and sea.

From this point the British, under the command now of Charles Cornwallis, face increasingly strong opposition as they press on into North Carolina. There are numerous bitterly fought skirmishes, often in the nature of civil war, because the [**Loyalists**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=jau#jau) in this region are very active in support of the British.

**Yorktown: AD 1781**

The final result of the campaigns of 1780 and 1781 is that Cornwallis presses too far north, deep into Virginia, and finds himself isolated. He moves his army to Yorktown, at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, and sets about fortifying this position as one where he can survive until relieved by a fleet from New York.

Meanwhile George Washington has been waiting to mount a joint operation with the French navy. Seeing his chance in the plight of Cornwallis, he arranges a rendezvous in the Chesapeake with the admiral commanding a French fleet in the West Indies. He then marches an army south through New Jersey and embarks them on ships in Delaware Bay for transport to Williamsburg, a few miles west of Yorktown.

By the end of September 1781 Washington is besieging Yorktown with an army of about 14,000 men (including 5000 French troops) and the French fleet is completing the blockade by sea. With no practical hope of any relief from New York, Cornwallis surrenders on October 19.

This effectively brings to an end the war of the American Revolution. The European nations continue to scrap at sea (Spain takes Minorca back from the British in 1782), but Yorktown is the last engagement of the war in America. The British drag their heels in evacuating their two prizes of the campaign - they remain in Charleston until November 1782 and in New York until October 1783. By then a peace treaty has been signed in Paris.

**Independence achieved: AD 1783**

The treaty signed in Paris on 3 September 1783 brings the American Revolution to its successful conclusion. The American commissioners in the negotiations (Benjamin Franklin and John Adams among their number) win extremely good terms for the new nation. Its independence is acknowledged without reservation, and its agreed frontiers are unexpectedly generous.

To the coastal strip of the thirteen colonies is now added the entire region west as far as the Mississippi and north to the Great Lakes. This was the area bitterly fought over between Britain and France [**in 1754-60**](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?gtrack=pthc&ParagraphID=alp#alp). It now falls to the colonists as an immensely rich area available for westward expansion.