

The War Begins

The First Continental Congress

Fifty men met in Philadelphia in September, 1774. They all agreed that England was unfair to her colonies, but they did not agree about what to do. Most men only wanted England to be fair to the colonists. Only a few men had decided that it was time America became independent from England.

Finally they made a list of complaints against England. They were supposed to have the same rights that all Englishmen had; the king acted as though they had no rights at all. The colonists asked that their rights as Englishmen be respected. Then they agreed that the people of Massachusetts should not obey the laws that England had forced

upon her. To show that they meant business, the colonists agreed not to buy goods made in England. This meeting was called the **First Continental Congress**.

“If England does not listen, then we will return in May to hold a second Continental Congress.”

How did King George react? He sent warships and more soldiers to the colonies. He was determined to force the colonists to obey.

The Colonists Prepare to Fight

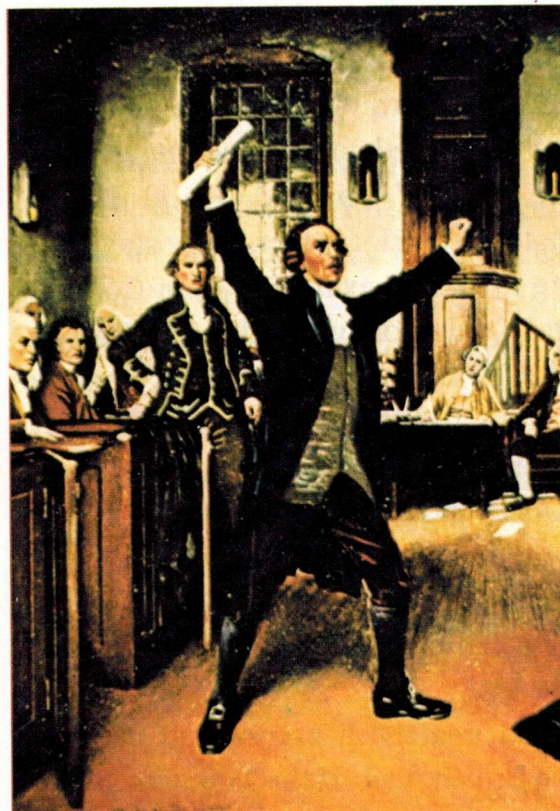
The British warships and soldiers upset the colonists. They began to drill and train as soldiers. Colonists began to hide gunpowder and ammunition.

Many Massachusetts men called themselves “**Minutemen**” because they said they could be ready to fight at a minute’s notice.

Fight for what? They were willing to fight for the rights of Englishmen. They thought that once King George realized they meant business, he would give the colonists their rights again.

Meanwhile, in Virginia, a young man named **Patrick Henry** gave a stirring speech which began changing the minds of many colonists. In his argument for fighting for independence, Patrick Henry cried:

Gentlemen may cry, peace, peace—but



“Give me liberty or give me death!”
Patrick Henry’s stirring speech began to change many colonists’ minds.

there is no peace.... Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

Those who, like Patrick Henry, now wanted America to be free from England’s rule were called **patriots**. Those who remained loyal to England were called **loyalists** or **Tories**.

How did the British react to the colonists in Massachusetts? The British general heard that the patriots had secretly stored guns and ammunition in the town of Concord. He also knew that two patriot leaders were staying in the town of Lexington. Both Concord and Lexington were close to Boston. The British began making plans to march to Lexington and Concord where they hoped to capture the patriot leaders and capture the patriots' supply of guns and ammunition.

The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere

Fortunately, a patriot had heard of the British plan. If the Minutemen were warned, perhaps they could stop the British.

Paul Revere, a patriot from Boston, and another man named **William Dawes**, jumped on their horses and rode through the countryside. It was night. To wake and warn the colonists, they shouted "The British are coming!"

The Minutemen jumped out of their beds and prepared to fight. The two patriot leaders were warned just in time for them to escape being captured.

When the British soldiers reached Lexington, they met a group of brave Minutemen. Suddenly, the silence at Lexington was shattered by the sound of a gunshot. No one knows who fired the shot, but it started the War for Independence, and it signaled the birth of American freedom. From this shot would come a fight for liberty that the whole world watched with interest. And from this shot would come the creation of a new country which would play a great part in world history. Because that one shot changed history, it has come to be called the "shot heard round the world." Ralph Waldo Emerson, a famous American poet, wrote a poem about the battle at Lexington:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.

Paul Revere rode through the streets and countryside warning the colonists that the British were coming.





The first shots of the Revolutionary War were fired at Lexington, Massachusetts.

After that first battle at **Lexington**, the British marched to **Concord**, but the Minutemen there were able to push them back. The war had begun, but the purpose of the war still was not clear. Were the colonists going to fight for their rights as Englishmen, or were they fighting for their independence?