

*As anger toward the British grew, Americans began to consider the possibility of independence.*

## A Meeting in Philadelphia

SS.8.A.3.2, SS.8.A.3.3, SS.8.A.3.6, SS.8.A.3.8

***What role did key individuals play in the movement toward independence?***

In September 1774, fifty-five delegates gathered in Philadelphia. They had come to set up a political body that would represent Americans and challenge British control. The delegates called this body the Continental Congress.

Leaders from twelve of the thirteen colonies attended the meeting. Only Georgia did not send a representative. Massachusetts sent fiery Samuel Adams and his lawyer cousin, John Adams. New York sent John Jay, another lawyer. Virginia sent George Washington as well as Richard Henry Lee and Patrick Henry, two outspoken defenders of colonial rights. Patrick Henry wanted the colonies to unite in firm resistance to Britain. He summed up the meaning of the meeting when he addressed the delegates on its second day:

"The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."

—Patrick Henry, at the Continental Congress, 1774

## The Delegates Vote

The delegates discussed complaints against the British. Then they voted. In a statement of grievances, the delegates called for the repeal of 13 acts of Parliament. They believed these laws violated the "laws of nature, the principles of the English constitution, and the several charters" of the colonies. The delegates also voted to boycott British trade. The colonies would not import or use any British goods, nor would they sell their goods in Great Britain.

Continental Congress delegates also decided to endorse the Suffolk Resolves, prepared by the people of Boston and other Suffolk County towns in Massachusetts. These resolutions declared the Coercive Acts to be illegal. They called on the county's residents to arm themselves against the British. After delegates endorsed the resolves, other colonies also organized militias—groups of citizen soldiers.

## The Colonial Militias

American colonists had a long tradition of serving and protecting their communities in militias. Members of a militia were an important part of each town's defense. Militia members trained and had drills with the other citizen soldiers. They practiced using muskets and cannons. Each member was required to provide his own weapon—usually a musket—and ammunition. Later, as tension between Britain and the colonies grew, towns began to gather and store military supplies.

**Explaining** What was the purpose of the Continental Congress?

## Fighting Begins

SS.8.A.3.6, SS.8.A.3.8

***Why were the battles at Lexington and Concord important?***

Many colonists believed that if fighting with the British were to break out, it would happen in New England. Militias in Massachusetts held drills, made bullets, and stockpiled weapons. Some militias were known as **minutemen** because they boasted they would be ready to fight at a minute's notice. In the winter of 1774–1775, a British officer stationed in Boston noted in his diary:

"The people are evidently making every preparation for resistance. They are taking every means to provide themselves with Arms."

—from *Diary of Frederick Mackenzie*, 1775

## Great Britain Sends Troops

The British also got ready for a fight. King George told Parliament that the New England Colonies were "in a state of rebellion" and that "blows must decide" who would control America. By April 1775, several thousand British troops were in and around Boston, with more on the way. British general Thomas Gage had orders to seize the weapons from the Massachusetts militia and arrest the leaders.

Gage learned that the militia stored arms and ammunition at Concord, a town about 20 miles (32 km) northwest of Boston. He ordered 700 troops under Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith "to Concord, where you will seize and destroy all the artillery and ammunition you can find."

## The British on the Move

On the night of April 18, 1775, colonial protest leader Dr. Joseph Warren walked through Boston. Watching for any unusual activity by the British, he saw troops marching out of the city.

Warren alerted Paul Revere and William Dawes, members of the Sons of Liberty. Revere and Dawes rode to Lexington, a town east of Concord, to spread the word that the British were coming. Revere galloped across the countryside, shouting his warning of the approaching troops. Hearing the news, Samuel Adams said, "What a glorious morning this is!" He was ready to fight. A British patrol later captured Dawes and Revere. Another rider named Samuel Prescott carried the warning to Concord.

## Lexington and Concord

Meanwhile, the British continued their march. At dawn, the redcoats **approached** Lexington. There they ran into about 70 waiting minutemen. Led by Captain John Parker, the minutemen stood on the town common with muskets in hand. Badly outnumbered, the minutemen were about to give way to the redcoats. Just then, a shot was fired—from where is still not clear. Both sides let loose an exchange of bullets. When the shooting ended, eight minutemen lay dead.

The British continued on to Concord. While some troops burned the few weapons they found, the others met a group of minutemen waiting at the North Bridge. In a short battle, the British took heavy losses. They began to make their way back to Boston.

All along the road, colonists hid behind trees and fired on the soldiers. By the time the redcoats reached Boston, at least 174 were wounded and 73 were dead.

About 60 years later, poet Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in "The Concord Hymn" that the Americans at Lexington and Concord had fired the "shot heard 'round the world." The battle for independence had begun.

**Explaining** Why did British troops march to Concord?

## More Military Action

SS.8.A.3.6, SS.8.A.3.8, SS.8.C.1.2, LA.8.1.6.1

### *What were the beliefs of the Loyalists and Patriots?*

After the battles at Lexington and Concord, armed conflict with British forces quickly spread. Benedict Arnold, a captain in the Connecticut militia, raised a force of 400 to seize Fort Ticonderoga near Lake Champlain in New York. Ticonderoga occupied a key location. It was also rich in military supplies. Arnold learned that Ethan Allen of nearby Vermont also planned to attack the fort. So Arnold joined forces with Allen's men—the **so-called** Green Mountain Boys. Together, they took the British by surprise. Fort Ticonderoga surrendered on May 10, 1775.

Later, Arnold became a traitor to the Patriot cause. He sold military information to the British. When his crime was discovered in September 1780, he fled to British-controlled New York City. There he commanded British troops and led raids against the Americans in Virginia and Connecticut.

## The Battle of Bunker Hill

Following Lexington and Concord, more volunteers joined the colonial militias. Soon militia around Boston numbered about 20,000 strong.

The British remained in control of the city, with the militia camped nearby. On June 16, 1775, militia commanded by Colonel William Prescott set up posts on Bunker Hill and Breed's Hill, across the harbor from Boston.

The next day, the redcoats assembled at Breed's Hill. Bayonets drawn, they charged. Low on ammunition, Prescott reportedly ordered, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes." The Americans opened fire, forcing the British to retreat. Twice more the redcoats charged, receiving furious fire from above. Finally, the Americans ran out of gunpowder and had to withdraw.

The battle on Breed's Hill—which became known as the Battle of Bunker Hill—was a British victory. Yet the British suffered heavy losses of more than 1,000 dead and wounded. They were learning that defeating the Americans on the battlefield would be neither quick nor easy.

## Choosing Sides

As news spread about these battles, the colonists each faced a major decision—to join the rebels or remain loyal to Great Britain.

Those who sided with Britain, the **Loyalists**, did not think unfair taxes and laws justified a rebellion. Some were officeholders who felt a responsibility to uphold British rule. Others had not suffered from British policies and saw no reason to break with Britain. Still others believed Britain would win the war and did not want to be on the losing side.

The **Patriot**, on the other hand, supported the war. They believed that the colonists should have the right to govern themselves. The Patriots were determined to fight the British until American independence was won.

The American Revolution was not just a war between America and Britain. It was also a civil war—Patriots against Loyalists.

**Describing** What did the British learn from the Battle of Bunker Hill?

### Thinking Like a **HISTORIAN**

#### Making Predictions

Loyalists came from all parts of American society. Political differences divided communities and even split families. Benjamin Franklin's son, William, served as Royal Governor of New Jersey. When the Revolution began, William remained loyal to Britain and quarreled with his father. Do you think Benjamin Franklin and William Franklin resolved their differences? For more about making predictions, review *Thinking Like a Historian*.

## LESSON 3 REVIEW

### Review Vocabulary

1. Write a paragraph explaining what the words below have in common.

**a.** minuteman **b.** Loyalist **c.** Patriot

LA.8.1.6.1

### Answer the Guiding Questions

2. **Explaining** How did support for the Suffolk Resolves by the Continental Congress push the colonies closer to war?

SS.8.A.3.2

3. **Describing** What fighting methods did the colonists use against the British troops marching back to Boston from Concord?

SS.8.A.3.6, SS.8.A.3.8

4. **Interpreting** Reread Patrick Henry's quote about the Continental Congress. What change was taking place in how the colonists saw themselves?

SS.8.A.3.8

5. **NARRATIVE WRITING** Write a scene from a play in which colonists in a small town react to the news of the Battle of Lexington. Remember, not all colonists wanted independence from Britain.

SS.8.A.3.8