



# INSIDE THE VAULT

*The Olive Branch Petition*  
with Dr. Denver Brunzman

THURSDAY, JULY 3, 2025

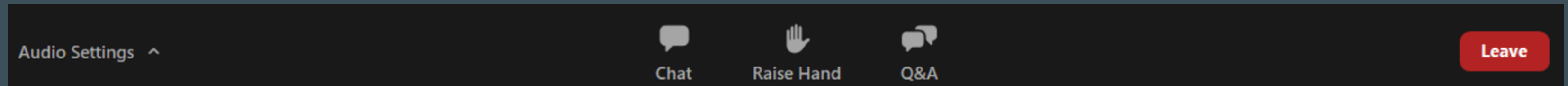
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THE  
GILDER LEHRMAN  
INSTITUTE  
of  
AMERICAN HISTORY

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# How to Participate



- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature.
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.
- The views expressed here are those of the historian.

## For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.





# Today's Documents

( 130 )  
ted, the farther consideration thereof was deferred till to-morrow.

Adjourned till to-morrow at 9 o'clock.

SATURDAY, JULY 8, 1775.

Met according to adjournment.

The petition to the King being engrossed, was compared at the table and signed by the Members present.

To the KING's Most Excellent MAJESTY.

Most gracious Sovereign,

WE your Majesty's faithful subjects of the Colonies of New-Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Rhode-Island, and Providence Plantations, Connecticut, New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Counties of New-Castle, Kent and Sussex on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North-Carolina, and South-Carolina, in behalf of ourselves, and the inhabitants of these Colonies, who have deputed us to represent them in General Congress, entreat your Majesty's gracious attention to this our humble petition.

The union between our Mother Country and these Colonies, and the energy or mild and just government, produced benefits so remarkably important, and afforded such an assurance of their permanency and increase, that the wonder and envy of other nations were excited, while they beheld Great-Britain rising to a power the most extraordinary, the world had ever known.

Her rivals, observing that there was no probability of this happy connection being broken by civil dissensions, and apprehending its future effects, if left any longer undisturbed, resolved to prevent her receiving such continual and formidable accessions of wealth and strength, by check-

( 131 )  
ing the growth of those settlements from which they were to be derived.

In the prosecution of this attempt, events so unfavourable to the design took place, that every friend to the interest of Great-Britain and these Colonies, entertained pleasing and reasonable expectations of seeing an additional force and exertion immediately given to the operations of the union hitherto experienced, by an enlargement of the dominions of the crown, and the removal of ancient and warlike enemies to a greater distance.

At the conclusion thereof of the late war, the most glorious and advantageous that ever had been carried on by British Arms, your loyal colonists, having contributed to its success, by such repeated and strenuous exertions, as frequently procured them the distinguished approbation of your Majesty, of the late King, and of Parliament, doubted not, but that they should be permitted, with the rest of the empire, to share in the blessings of peace, and the emoluments of victory and conquest,

While these recent and honourable acknowledgements of their merits remained on record in the journals and acts of that august legislature, the Parliament, undeluged by the imputation or even the suspicion of any offence, they were alarmed by a new system of statutes and regulations adopted for the administration of the Colonies, that filled their minds with the most painful fears and jealousies; and, to their inexpressible astonishment, perceived the danger of a foreign quarrel quickly succeeded by domestic danger, in their judgment of a more dreadful kind.

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Nor

## IN CONGRESS,

MARCH 23, 1776.

WHEREAS the Petitions of these United Colonies to the King, for the Redress of great and manifest Grievances, have not only been rejected, but treated with Scorn and Contempt; and the Opposition to Designs evidently formed to reduce them to a State of servile Subjection, and their necessary Defence against hostile Forces actually employed to subdue them, declared Rebellion: And Whereas an unjust War hath been commenced against them, which the Commanders of the British Fleets and Armies have prosecuted and still continue to prosecute with their utmost Vigour and in a cruel Manner; wasting, spoiling and destroying the Country, burning Houses and defenceless Towns, and exposing the helpless Inhabitants to every misery from the Inclemency of the Winter, and not only urging Savages to invade the Country, but instigating Negroes to murder their Masters: And Whereas the Parliament of Great-Britain hath lately passed an Act, affirming these Colonies to be in open Rebellion; forbidding all Trade and Commerce with the Inhabitants thereof, until they shall accept Pardons and submit to despotic Rule; declaring their Property, wherever found upon the Water, liable to Seizure and Confiscation; and enacting that what had been done there, by Virtue of the Royal Authority, were just and lawful Acts and shall be so deemed: From all which it is manifest, that the iniquitous Scheme, concerted to deprive them of the Liberty they have a right to by the Laws of Nature and the English Constitution, will be pertinaciously pursued. It being, therefore, necessary to provide for their Defence and Security, and justifiable to make Reprisals upon their Enemies and otherwise to annoy them, according to the Laws and Usages of Nations; the CONGRESS, trusting that such of their Friends in Great-Britain (of whom it is confessed there are many intitled to Applause and Gratitude for their Patriotism and Benevolence, and in whose Favor a Discrimination of Property cannot be made) as shall suffer by Captures, will impute it to the Authors of our common Calamities, DO DECLARE AND RESOLVE as followeth, *to wit*,

RESOLVED, That the Inhabitants of these Colonies be permitted to fit out Armed Vessels to cruise on the Enemies of these United Colonies.

RESOLVED, That all Ships and other Vessels, their Tackle, Apparel, and Furniture, and all Goods, Wares and Merchandizes belonging to any Inhabitant or Inhabitants of Great-Britain, taken on the high Seas, or between high and low water Mark, by any Armed Vessel fitted out by any private Person or Persons to whom Commissions shall be granted, and being libelled and prosecuted in any Court erected for the Trial of Maritime Affairs in any of these Colonies, shall be deemed and adjudged to be lawful Prize, and after deducting and paying the Wages the Seamen and Mariners on board of such Captures as are Merchant Ships and Vessels shall be intitled to according to the Terms of their Contracts until the Time of Adjudication, shall be condemned to and for the Use of the Owner or Owners, and the Officers, Marines and Mariners of such Armed Vessel, according to such Rules and Proportions as they shall agree on. *Provided Always*, That this Resolution shall not extend, or be construed to extend, to any Vessel bringing Settlers, Arms, Ammunition, or Warlike Stores to and for the Use of these Colonies, or any of the Inhabitants thereof who are Friends to the American Cause, or to such Warlike Stores, or to the Effects of such Settlers.

RESOLVED, That all Ships or Vessels with their Tackle, Apparel and Furniture, Goods, Wares and Merchandizes belonging to any Inhabitant of Great-Britain, as aforesaid, which shall be taken by any of the Vessels of War of these United Colonies, shall be deemed forfeited, one third after deducting and paying the Wages of Seamen and Mariners, as aforesaid, to the Officers and Men on board, and two thirds to the use of the United Colonies.

RESOLVED, That all Ships or Vessels with their Tackle, Apparel and Furniture, Goods, Wares and Merchandizes belonging to any Inhabitants of Great-Britain as aforesaid, which shall be taken by any Vessel of War fitted out by and at the Expence of any of the United Colonies shall be deemed forfeited, and divided, after deducting and paying the Wages of Seamen and Mariners as aforesaid, in such Manner and Proportions as the Assembly or Convention of such Colony shall direct.

RESOLVED, That all Vessels, their Tackle, Apparel and Furniture, and Cargoes belonging to Inhabitants of Great-Britain, as aforesaid, and all Vessels which may be employed in carrying Supplies to the Ministerial Armies, which shall happen to be taken near the Shores of any of these Colonies, by the People of the Country or Detachments from the Army, shall be deemed lawful Prize, and the Court of Admiralty within the said Colony is required, on Condemnation thereof, to adjudge that all Charges and Expences which may attend the Capture and Trial be first paid out of the Monies arising from the Sales of the Prize, and the Remainder equally divided among all those who shall have been actually engaged and employed in taking the said Prize. *Provided*, That where any Detachments of the Army shall have been employed as aforesaid, their Part of the Prize-money shall be distributed among them in Proportion to the Pay of the Officers and Soldiers so employed.

*Extract from the Minutes,*

CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

PHILADELPHIA: Printed by JOHN DUNLAP.

Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress Held at Philadelphia, May 10, 1775, Philadelphia and London, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05704)

Congress's Reaction to the King's Rejection of Olive Branch Petition, March 23, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC04771)



# Dr. Denver Brunzman



Denver Brunzman is associate professor and chair of the History Department at George Washington University, where his courses include George Washington and His World, taught annually at the Mount Vernon estate. He is the author of the award-winning book *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2013), coauthor of a leading college and AP US History textbook, *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People* (2016; 2020), and coeditor of *The American Revolution Reader* (2014), among other publications. His honors include the Oscar and Shoshana Trachtenberg Prize for Teaching Excellence and induction into the George Washington University Academy of Distinguished Teachers (2018) as well as selection to the College Board AP US History Development Committee (2018–2023; Higher Ed Chair, 2021–2023).



# Interpreting the American Revolution

- Americanization vs. Anglicization
- Olive Branch Petition (July 5, 1775)



“The Death of General Wolfe,” an engraving by Benjamin West, s.l., 1771 (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08878.0086)



# Three Imperial Crises

1. Stamp Act Crisis (1764–1766)

2. Townshend Acts Crisis (1767–1770)

3. Tea Act/Independence Crisis (1773–1776)



The Stamp Act, published in London, 1765. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC03562.11)

Anno quinto

## Georgii III. Regis.

C A P. XII.

An Act for granting and applying certain Stamp Duties, and other Duties, in the *British* Colonies and Plantations in *America*, towards further defraying the Expences of defending, protecting, and securing the same; and for amending such Parts of the several Acts of Parliament relating to the Trade and Revenues of the said Colonies and Plantations, as direct the Manner of determining and recovering the Penalties and Forfeitures therein mentioned.



WHEREAS by an Act made in the last Session of Parliament, several Duties were granted, continued, and appropriated, towards defraying the Expences of defending, protecting, and securing, the British Colonies and Plantations in America: And whereas it is just and necessary, that Provision be made for raising a further Revenue within Your Majesty's Dominions in America, towards defraying the said Expences: We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal Subjects, the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, have

Preamble.

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*The Battle of Lexington, April 19, 1775. Plate 1.*

*Presented by John & Hanson, May 1775.*



1. Major Pitman, at the head of the Regular Grenadiers.  
2. The Party, who first fired on the Provincials at Lexington.  
3. Part of the Provincial Company of Lexington.

4. Regular Companies on the road to Concord.  
5. The Meetinghouse at Lexington.  
6. The Publican.

*A. Doolittle. Sculp.*

“The Battle of Lexington” by Amos Doolittle, April 1775.

(Marian S. Carson Collection, Library of Congress)



# Independence Hall (Pennsylvania State House)



THE STATE-HOUSE IN PHILADELPHIA 1776.

“The State-House in Philadelphia” by John Serz, 1776.

(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-pga-04142)



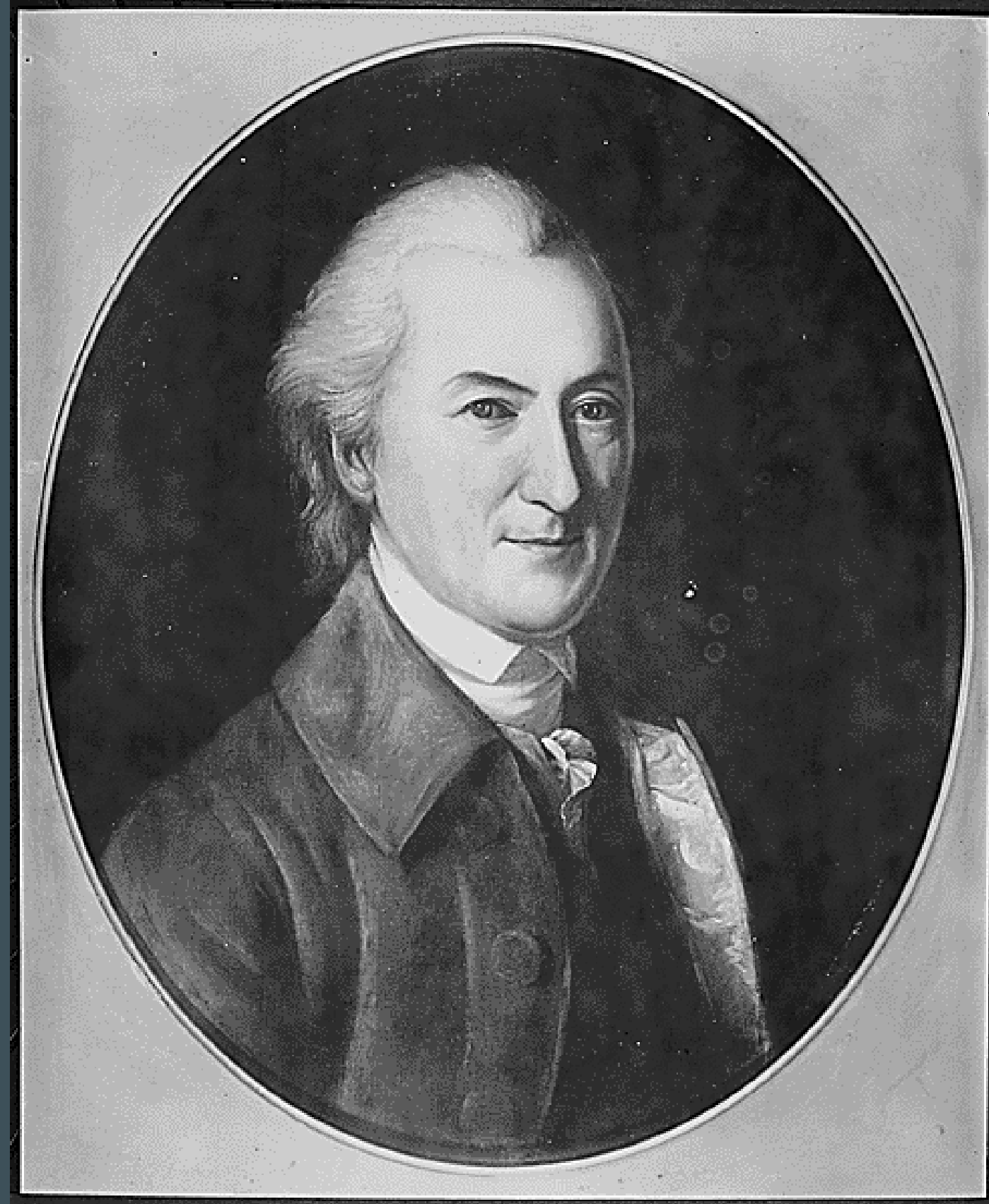
# Lord North's Conciliatory Proposal



“Frederick lord North” by Robert Pollard, 1780. (Library of Congress Rare Books and Special Collections Division, LC-USZ62-45299 )



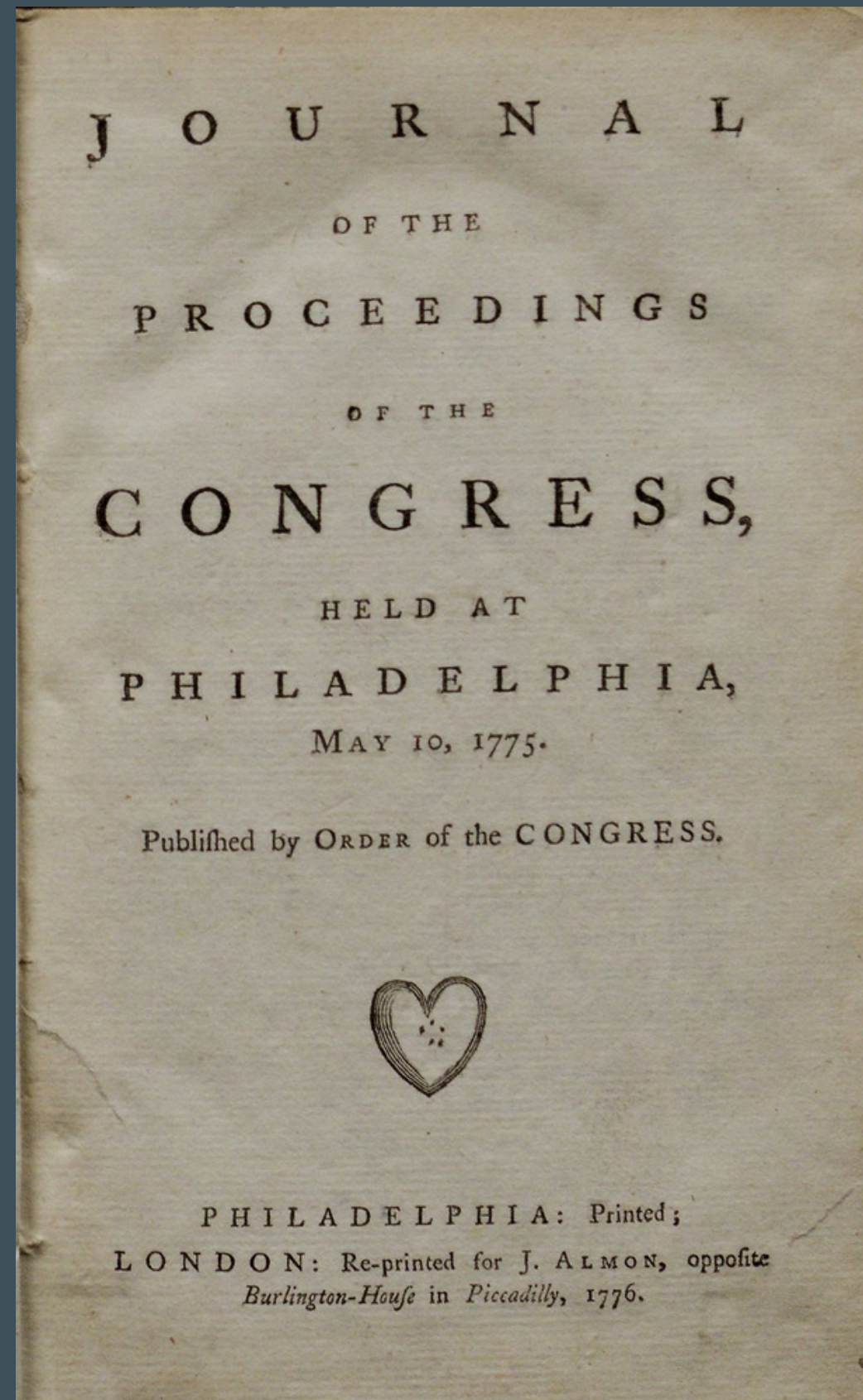
# John Dickinson



Portrait of John Dickinson, n.d.  
(National Archives and Records Administration, 532841)



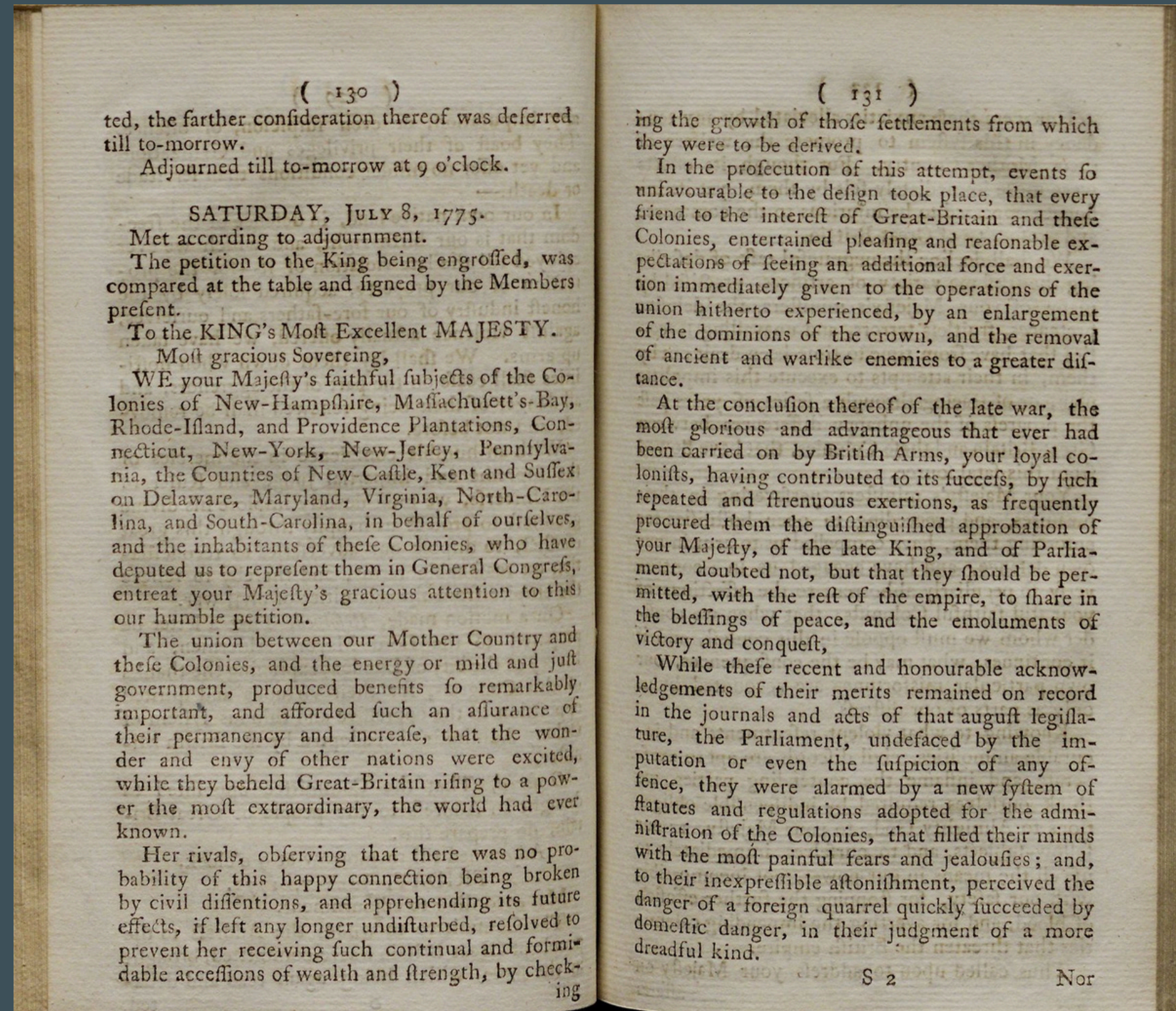
# Journal of Congress



Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress Held at Philadelphia, May 10, 1775, Philadelphia and London, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05704)



# Olive Branch Petition



Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress Held at Philadelphia, May 10, 1775, Philadelphia and London, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05704)



# Olive Branch Petition (July 5, 1775)

“

We shall decline the ungrateful talk of the describing the irksome variety of artifices, practiced by many of your Majesty's ministers, the delusive pretences, fruitless terrors, and unavailing feverities that have from time to time been dealt out by them, in their attempts to execute this impolitic plan or of tracing through a series of years past the progress of the unhappy differences between Great Britain and these Colonies, that have flowed from this fatal source.”

Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress Held at Philadelphia, May 10, 1775, Philadelphia and London, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05704)





# Olive Branch Petition (July 5, 1775)

“

Knowing to what violent resentments and incurable animosities, civil discords are apt to exasperate and inflame the contending parties, we think ourselves required by indispensable obligations to Almighty God, to your Majesty, to our fellow-subjects, and to ourselves, immediately to use all the means in our power, not incompatible with our safety, for stopping the further effusion of blood, and for averting the impending calamities that threaten the British empire.”

Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress Held at Philadelphia, May 10, 1775, Philadelphia and London, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05704)





# Olive Branch Petition (July 5, 1775)

“

We therefore beseech your Majesty, that your royal authority and influence be graciously interposed to procure us relief from our afflicting fears and jealousies, occasioned by the system before-mentioned, and to settle peace through every part of your dominions, with all humility submitting part of your dominions, with all humility submitting to your Majesty's wife consideration . . . That your Majesty may enjoy a long and prosperous reign, and that your descendants may govern your dominions, with honor to themselves and happiness to their subjects, is our sincere prayer.”

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# Francis Lightfoot Lee



My Dear Page      Philad<sup>a</sup> Jan<sup>y</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> 1776

I received yours of the 20<sup>th</sup> Instant last night. I will deliver any Letter you may send to Mr Pittenhouse, tho' my acquaintance with him is but slight.

A very critical Time is approaching. It is expected that administration will make some advances towards an accommodation. There are English Papers in this City brought by a Ship from Dantzig, that mention Mr Paine, who carried the last Petition to the King being examined before the House of Coms. His answer was short & clear & seemed to have weight with some of that Body, who had before been kept in the dark. The expression is, that he had made several of them Quakers. The Duke of Grafton, the Archbishop of Canterbury & the Bishop of Peterborough have supported the American cause. The Colus begins to operate & I think some of them will quake ere it be long.

Administration have demanded 25,000 Men for the American service, which is ridiculed by those in opposition, as entirely insufficient, after having

Letter from Frances Lightfoot Lee to John Page, January 30, 1776. Page 1.  
(Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC04806)



# Aftermath



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JOURNAL  
OF THE  
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CONGRESS,  
HELD AT  
PHILADELPHIA,  
MAY 10, 1775.

Published by ORDER of the CONGRESS.



PHILADELPHIA: Printed;  
LONDON: Re-printed for J. ALMON, opposite  
*Burlington-House in Piccadilly, 1776.*

Q&A



Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress Held at Philadelphia, May 10, 1775, Philadelphia and London, 1776. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC05704)



# Upcoming Programs

## INSIDE THE VAULT:

August 7 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- Manhattan Project Scientists Predict a Nuclear Arms Race, with Cynthia Kelly, President, Atomic Heritage Foundation

September 4 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)

- The Battle of Antietam & the Emancipation Proclamation, with Dr. Edward Ayers, Professor of History, University of Richmond

BOOK BREAKS: July 6 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)

- Judith Giesberg will discuss her book *Last Seen: The Enduring Search by Formerly Enslaved People to Find Their Lost Families*

