In CONGRESS



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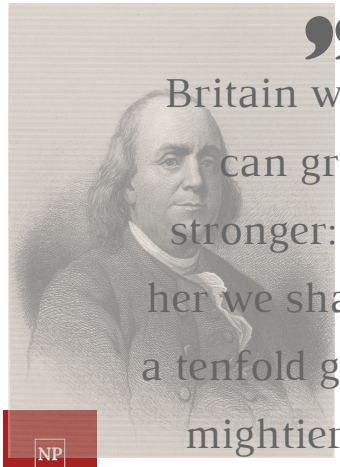


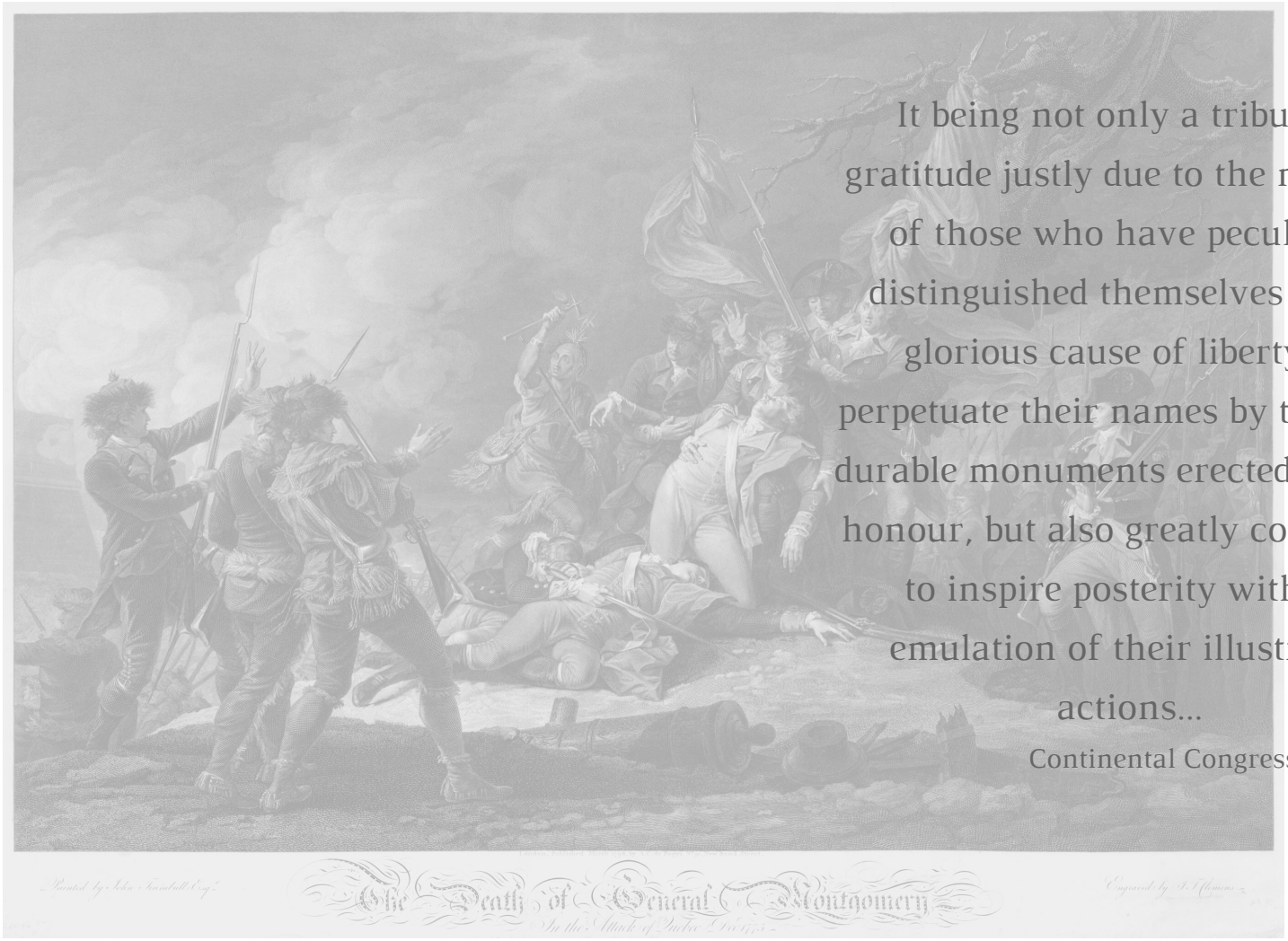
> Britain without us can grow no stronger: Without her we shall become a tenfold greater and mightier People.

Benjamin Franklin

Preparing for Independence

July 4, 1776 is a day that is etched in American history and celebrated annually nationwide. The Declaration of Independence is just one of the accomplishments of the Second Continental Congress which lasted from May 10, 1775 to March 1, 1781. The Second Continental Congress was a study in nation building as the Delegates slowly and at times painfully built a governing structure for the United Colonies. This newsletter begins a series of quarterly newsletters that will document these efforts for all who are interested in learning more about the first iterations of the United States Congress.

The first quarter of 1776 saw the Continental Army and Congress growing in strength. Colonel Henry Knox accomplished his near miraculous journey to Fort Ticonderoga delivering much need artillery to General George Washington that would ultimately help end the British siege of Boston. The Congress also continued to strengthen its administrative functions so that it operated more like a governing structure rather than an ad hoc committee. These accomplishments were key to the larger developments to come in the year.



It being not only a tribute of gratitude justly due to the memory of those who have peculiarly distinguished themselves in the glorious cause of liberty, to perpetuate their names by the most durable monuments erected to their honour, but also greatly conducive to inspire posterity with an emulation of their illustrious actions...

Continental Congress 1776, 4:89

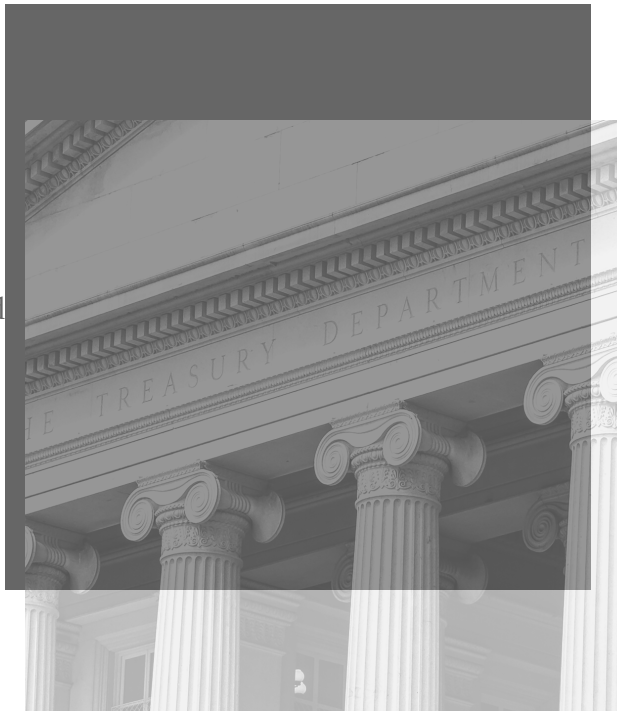
Photo Credit: The Death of General Montgomery, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Recognizing Continental Soldiers



At the close of 1775, the Continental Army suffered a tremendous strategic and professional loss in the defeat of American forces at Quebec. Major General Richard Montgomery was tragically killed in the battle. His death marks one of the first instances of a fallen hero being memorialized by the Congress. Shortly after his death, Congress agreed to erect a monument in his honor. On March 25, 1776, after successfully ending the siege of Boston, Congress planned to have a commemorative gold medal struck for General Washington. Continental Congress 1776, 4:234. March 25 is now recognized as Medal of Honor Day annually.

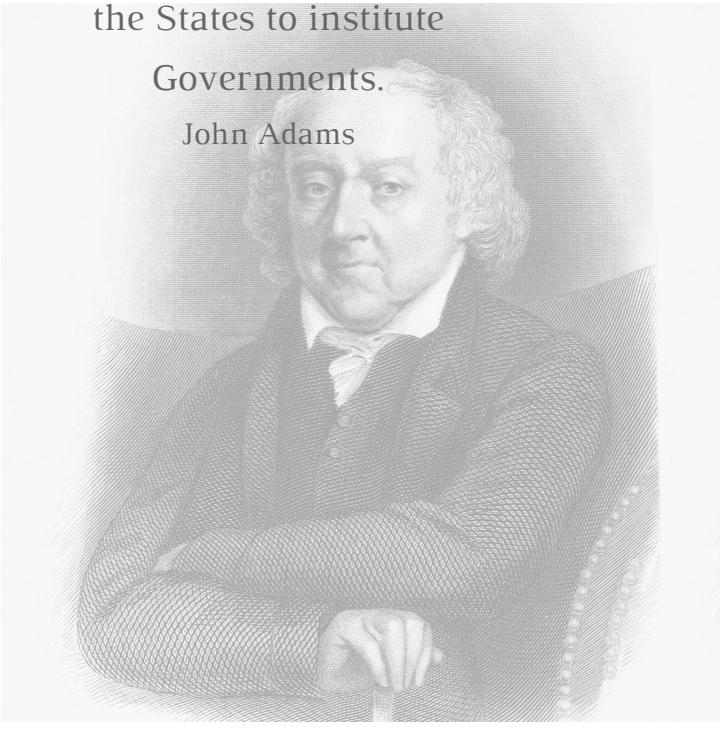
Improving Finance and Commerce



After spending hours of daily session time paying accounts, on February 17, 1776 Congress agreed to appoint a standing committee for the treasury that would report to Congress on the state of the treasury, examine how to support the Canadian expedition with gold and silver, and hire staff to tend to the public accounts, among other things. Continental Congress 1776, 4:156.

Congress also encouraged the Colonies to begin exploring ways and means to produce certain commodities and establish "...a society for the improvement of agriculture, arts, manufactures, and commerce, and to maintain a correspondence between such societies, that the rich and numerous natural advantage of this country, for supporting its inhabitants, may not be neglected..." Continental Congress 1776, 4:224.

> In these We obtained one Step more towards our great Object, a General Recommendation to the States to institute Governments.
>
> John Adams



International Diplomacy

Building a coalition with Canada was a strategic objective early in the Revolutionary War. After military efforts in Quebec failed, Congress agreed to send a Commission of Delegates to negotiate with the Canadians that included Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase, and Charles Carroll. Continental Congress 1776, 4:215-21. Delegates debated the instructions to the Commission for several days with no resolution.

On March 20, they finally agreed to a set of instructions that emphasized the Colonies hope that Canadians would join with the United Colonies and establish their own government. John Adams noted in his diary that this was a significant step forward towards Congress recommending that the Colonies also establish their own governments. "[Wednesday March 20. 1776.] ," Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/01-03-02-0016-0080. [Original source: The Adams Papers, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, vol. 3, Diary, 1782–1804; Autobiography, Part One to October 1776, ed. L. H. Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 372.]