# 12 The Firebrands



After the Boston Massacre (you'll read about it in the next chapter), Samuel Adams made an official protest to the royal governor of Massachusetts.

Can you guess what a firebrand is? Firebrands were very useful when people didn't have matches and the only heat in a house came from the fireplace.

You have probably figured it out. A firebrand is a stick of wood with a spark of fire at one end.

Now, if you look in the dictionary you will see another meaning for firebrand. A firebrand can be a hothead: someone who sparks a revolution, someone who lights a fire in people's minds and hearts.

Historians say the American Revolution had three firebrands: Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Paine. That war of independence might have happened without them, but it certainly would have been different.

Patrick Henry was a great speaker; Tom Paine was a great writer. Samuel Adams could write well and think well, but what Adams really was was a super busybody. He got everyone keyed up, inspired, and moving.

Sam Adams was a New Englander from Boston with a Puritan background. Tom Paine came from England and lived in the Middle Colonies, in Philadelphia. He was a deist with Quaker friends. Patrick Henry was a southerner, an Anglican, a Virginian, and a country boy. These men were very different from one another, but alike in one important way: each understood, before most other Americans did, that a break from England was necessary.

A **deist** (DEE-ist) believes in God as creator of the universe. Deists reject the idea of an active God who directs worldly events.

In 1770 the annual meeting of New England Quakers prohibited slave owning—the first American organization to do so.

Remember, it took a long time for the colonists to think of themselves as Americans. They thought of themselves as English colonists. Even those who came from France or Germany or Holland soon thought of English rights as their rights.

When they stopped seeing themselves as English, they began to say they were Virginians, or New Englanders, or Carolinians. It was hard for them to understand that they could all be part of the same country. To begin with, they didn't know each other. That was because overland travel between colonies was very difficult. There were no good roads and few bridges. On the fastest stagecoach you could make eight miles an hour—as long as there were no ruts in the road, or mud, or ice. For poor people, travel meant going on foot. But if you were like most travelers, you rode horseback. If you needed to cross a river you usually had to find a boat. Your horses had to swim the river. If you had a lot of baggage, it might take many trips to get it all across. If the river current was swift, you could lose everything—even your life.

By 1760, with good winds and good luck, you could sail from Baltimore to London in four weeks. So wealthy Marylanders were more likely to go to England than to Massachusetts. And the same was true of the Virginians and the South Carolinians. London

still seemed the most exciting city in their world. Now can you see why most people in the different colonies were strangers to each other?

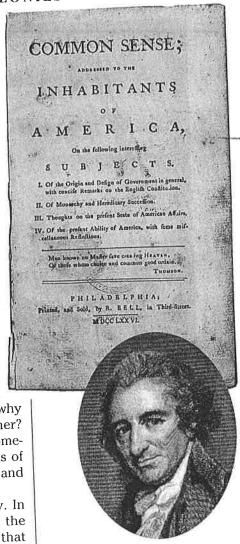
Well, the firebrands helped change that. Sam Adams started something called "committees of correspondence." They were groups of prominent citizens who wrote back and forth between colonies and helped each other with problems. They began to be friends.

Adams started other groups, such as the Sons of Liberty. In Boston, the Sons met under an old elm tree that Adams called the Liberty Tree. As soon as the British got a chance they chopped that tree down. (A liberty tree still stands in Annapolis, Maryland.)

But mostly what Sam Adams started was trouble for the British. He was a rabble-rouser and an agitator—a real firebrand—who helped brew up the Boston Tea Party and the fight against the Stamp Act. But you never would have known that to look at him.

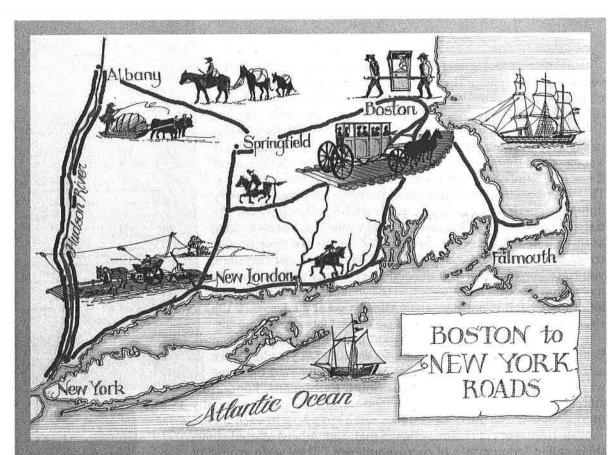
Sam Adams was a Humpty Dumpty-looking man: rumpled and pudgy. He came from a prominent Boston family, but he lost almost all the family money because he didn't care about business. Some people said that he was lazy, but he wasn't lazy when it came to fighting for freedom.

The English called Adams a public enemy, an outlaw, and a rebel. They wanted to hang him. He certainly was a troublemaker, but



On the title page of Tom Paine's Common Sense runs a couplet: "Man knows no Master save creating Heaven, / Or those whom choice and common good ordain." What does that mean?

### A HISTORY OF US



# On the Road, or Getting Around in Colonial Times

Until the middle of the 19th century, most American roads were made of dirt. Some were surfaced with gravel or oyster shells. With ice or snow on them they often became im-

passable. Spring thaws made them turn to mud. Even when they were dry and hard they were full of holes. A horseback rider could make his way, but for a heavy wagon or coach it was a dis-



A post rider blows a horn to announce his arrival in a town.

aster-wheels and axles broke or got mired in the mud.

When Benjamin Franklin became postmaster of the colonies he improved the roads so the mail could be carried more

> efficiently. These new roads were called post roads.

Some roads were made with rough logs; dirt was put on top of the logs. These roads were called corduroy roads. They were so

rough that sometimes they made horses go lame and joited wheeled vehicles into pieces.

There were good roads in ancient America. They were built by the Incas. The Inca roads were 25 feet wide and made of stone and asphalt with retaining walls, suspension bridges, and a series of watchtowers. The roads stretched thousands of miles, over mountaintops and across ravines, from Ecuador to Peru. They were constructed before the arrival of Christopher Columbus.

Sam Adams was different from other rebels in other times. He wanted more than just separation from England. He was inspired by a grander idea: the idea that America could be a special nation where people would be free of kings and princes. A nation where, for the first time in all of history, people would truly rule themselves.

His Puritan ancestors had described their colony as an experiment. They had hoped it would be a close to perfect society. They called it "a city on a hill," and they meant that others should see it and that it would be an example to the whole world. But the Puritan dream was only for Puritans. Sam Adams had a great dream that was for all people.

So did Tom Paine. Now, Sam Adams was a Harvard man who had old roots in the young country. Tom Paine was hardly off the boat from England, in 1774, when he became a firebrand of revolution. He didn't plan it that way. "I thought it very hard," he wrote, "to have the country set on fire...almost the moment I got into it."

He had been apprenticed to a corsetmaker when he was a boy in England. Corsets are tight undergarments that women wore to hold in their stomachs and make their waists look tiny. Being a corsetmaker was not exactly an exciting career—not for a boy with a mind like Tom's. So he ran away and went to sea. But that didn't work out. Then he tried to be a grocer, and a schoolteacher, and a tobacco seller. Nothing worked—except his fine mind, and that kept him learning. He went to lectures and he read everything he could find to read. When he met Ben Franklin in London, he knew he wanted to go to America.

He almost didn't make it. He caught a fever on board ship and was carried ashore half dead, but he was young and strong and he survived. Franklin had given him a letter that got him a job as a writer and magazine editor in Philadelphia. That was the perfect use for his talents, for he was a magician with words.

By the 1770s, the colonists were beginning to want to separate from England. But they weren't quite sure why, and they wondered if it was right to do so. Tom Paine was able to say clearly what people really knew in their hearts. He wrote a pamphlet called *Common Sense*. In it he told the colonists three important things:

- •Monarchy was a poor form of government and they would be better off without it.
- Great Britain was hurting their economy with taxes and trade restrictions.
- It was foolish for a small island 3,000 miles away to try to rule a whole continent.



A wagon negotiates a corduroy road. These were laid when a path was too muddy or steep to be traveled any other way. But it was like riding on a giant washboard.

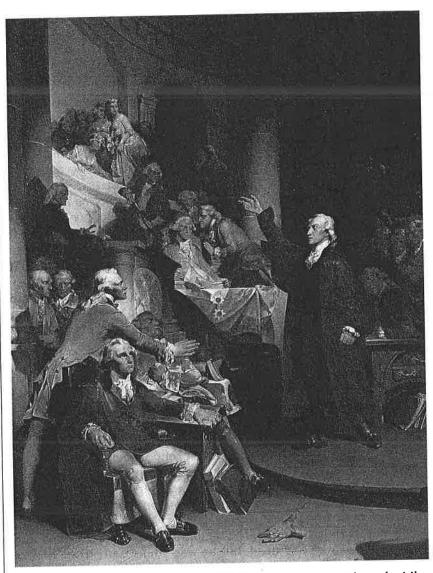
The first stagecoach from New York to Boston began operation in 1772. The trip took six days. Travelers slept in their clothes at inns along the way. They could expect to be waked at three in the morning and to spend 18 hours each day traveling.

A **monarchy** is a government headed by a king or queen.

## A HISTORY OF US

If you send a package to someone, you will pay shipping charges. We talk of shipments of freight. That's because in early America most freight was sent by oceangoing ships or riverboats. The 13 colonies hugged the Atlantic Ocean.

The Continental army was the American army that fought the British. It was an army raised at home—on the continent—as opposed to the king's army, which was shipped in from overseas. The revolutionary soldiers were also known as Patriots or Rebels—"rebs."



This is how an artist imagined Patrick Henry's 1765 speech against the Stamp Act to Virginia's House of Burgesses. On the floor in front he has thrown down a gauntlet—a glove—which is a traditional challenge to fight.

Well, of course, all that made common sense. But Tom Paine said it so eloquently that a whole lot of copies of *Common Sense* were sold in a very short time.

When the revolution began, Paine enlisted in the Continental army. Then he wrote a series of pamphlets about the war. He started one of them with these words: "These are the times that try men's souls." Stop and read that line again. "These are the times that try men's souls." What do you think of that as a way to start a book about war? Tom Paine made people stop and think. He was a man of deep beliefs. He believed in the American cause. He was not rich, but he gave

a third of his salary to help Washington's army, and he never took any money for his patriotic writings. He said that would demean them. "We have it in our power to begin the world again," wrote Paine,

and he really meant it.

Patrick Henry was the third firebrand, and, like Adams and Paine, he was a failure at first. He was born on a Virginia frontier farm. His father came from Scotland and had been to college there. He taught his son to read—both English and Latin. They read the Bible aloud together, and Patrick learned to love the sounds of the English language. He used English as no American speaker had done before him. He was called a "forest-born Demosthenes," and that was a compliment, because Demosthenes (dih-MOSS-thin-eez) was a great orator and a fighter for freedom in ancient Greece.

But Patrick Henry started out as a storekeeper, and then tried being a planter, and failed at both. Perhaps it was because he had a "passion for fiddling, dancing, and pleasantry." Finally, he studied law and spoke so well as a lawyer that he soon entered politics. He was elected to the House of Burgesses, which met in Virginia's capital, Williamsburg. And that was where he was when the Stamp Act was passed. He was young, but he stood up and said what he thought—that the stamp tax was a threat to liberty. Some of the older Virginians cried, "Treason!" because he was attacking the king. To that Patrick Henry is supposed to have answered, "If this be treason, make the most of it."

Some townsfolk and students from the College of William and Mary stood in the doorway of the House of Burgesses and heard that speech. Among them was a young lawyer named Thomas Jefferson. He never forgot it. He said Henry spoke "as Homer wrote," and Jefferson thought Homer the greatest of writers.

When the English governor of Virginia heard about Patrick Henry's speech, he was furious. He dissolved the House of Burgesses. (That means he told the members to go home.) But that just made them angry. They walked over to the Raleigh Tavern, where they kept on meeting. And Patrick Henry kept talking.

By 1775, 10 years after Henry's Stamp Act speech, it was no longer safe for the burgesses even to gather in Williamsburg. So they met in a church in Richmond. It was there that

> You can imagine how George III felt when he read Tom Paine's books.



A noose hangs ominously from the Liberty Tree as a mob of colonists makes a royal official drink a pot of tea.

To demean means to lower the worth of something.

Ominous (AHM in us) means threatening or menacing.

If you've read any books of Greek myths, legends, or history, you've probably read some of the stories that Homer told. Homer lived in ancient Greece and wrote two stories, the Iliad and the Odyssey, which are still among the most exciting tales of heroism and adventure ever written.

# A HISTORY OF US

# Someone who

heard Patrick Henry said, "The tendons on his neck stood out white and rigid like whipcords. His voice rose louder and louder, until the walls of the building seemed to shake.... Men leaned forward in their seats...their faces pale."

Patrick Henry gave his most famous speech. The port of Boston was closed, English soldiers were in the city, and the Massachusetts Assembly had been dissolved. Would Virginia sit idly by?

Henry stepped into the aisle, bowed his head, and held out his arms. He pretended his arms were chained as he began calmly, "Our chains are forged, their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston." His voice strengthened as he said, "The war is actually begun. The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms. Our brethren are already in the field. Why stand we here idle?... Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?"

Then Patrick Henry threw off the imaginary chains, stood up straight, and cried out, "Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"

# **Fellow Fiddlers**

Thomas Jefferson first met Patrick Henry at a fiddling session. No, they weren't fiddling around; well, maybe they were.
Gangly, carrot-headed Thomas Jefferson was on his way to the College of

William and Mary in Williamsburg. Sturdy Patrick Henry, who was 23, was a not-very-successful shopkeeper.

Christmas holydays at Col. Dandridge's in Hanover," wrote Jefferson. (Colonel Nathaniel Dandridge was a close relative of Martha Washington.) "During the festivity of the season, I met him [Patrick Henry] every day, and we became well acquainted, although I was much his junior, being then in my seventeenth year, and he a married man. His manners had something of a coarseness in them; his passion was music, dancing, and pleasantry. He excelled in the last, and it attached everyone to him." It was 1759, and they both got out their violins and were soon playing the

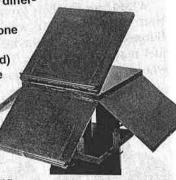
jigs and reels and other country dances that were part of the Virginia holiday celebration.

Patrick Henry wasn't happy as a shopkeeper weighing out flour, coffee, and sugar, so in his spare time he studied the law. In 1775—almost 16 years after that Christmas meeting—he said, "Give me liberty, or give me death," and helped inspire the American Revolution.

But he never stopped fiddling. He was a country musician and always popular.

Jefferson's taste was different. He loved serious music and amassed one of the largest collections of sheet (printed) music in America. He played the violin almost every day until the day he died.

Thomas Jefferson (above left) designed and built his own folding music stand (right) for a string quartet.



# 20 Declaring Independence



John Adams said that Jefferson should write the Declaration. "Well," said Jefferson, "if you are decided, I will do as well as I can."

Thomas Jefferson thought John Adams should write the document about independence. This is how Adams remembered their conversation:

"Why will you not?" Jefferson asked. "You ought to do it."

"Reasons enough."
"What can be your reasons?"

"Reason 1st. You are a Virginian, and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason 2d. I am obnoxious, suspected, and unpopular. You are very much otherwise. Reason 3d. You can write ten times better than I can."

Unless you like to memorize dates, there aren't many that you need to remember. But here are a few that are important:

1215

1492

1607

1620

What happened in those years? You can't remember? Go ahead and try. You might be surprised and find there is more in your brain than you realize. (Then, if you need to check, look on page 100.)

Now I have another date for you to remember, and this one is the most

important of all. Something happened on that day that changed America—it even changed the whole world. (It was a day that King George III didn't think important. He would find out how wrong he was.)

The date is July 4, 1776. That was the day the members of the Second Continental Congress approved a Declaration of Independence. It was a year after the Battle of Bunker Hill, and, finally, the Americans had made up their minds to be free of Great Britain.

But that wasn't why the world was changed. It was the words they used in that declaration that made all the difference.

The delegates believed that if they were going to vote for independence, they should have a good reason. They knew that when they signed the declaration they became traitors to England. They would each be hanged if England captured them.

If they were going to take that big risk, they wanted to make it worthwhile. And it would be worthwhile if they could help create a free nation, a great nation, a nation run by its citizens—something that had never before been done.

So they thought it important to explain exactly what they were doing and why it was necessary to be free of English rule.

That's why they asked Thomas Jefferson, one of the members of the Congress, to write a paper—called a "declaration"—that would:

- •tell their beliefs about good government;
- •tell what King George had done wrong; and
- announce that the colonies were now free and independent states.

Some people thought it surprising that Thomas Jefferson was asked to write the declaration. Jefferson was one of the youngest members of the Continental Congress. He was a tall, shy redhead who loved to read, run, ride horseback, and play the violin. He had a reputation for writing well. John Adams said of him, "Though a silent member in Congress, he was so prompt, frank...and decisive upon committees and in conversation—not even Samuel Adams was more so—that he soon seized upon my heart."

Jefferson had left his wife behind on his Virginia farm, and he missed her. He wasn't sure he could write a good declaration. But John Adams and Benjamin Franklin had faith in him. They talked Thomas Jefferson into trying. Adams told him, "You can write ten times better than I can."

Adams and Franklin were right. Thomas Jefferson knew just what to say, and he said it in a way that inspired people all over the world.

The whole Declaration is something to read and think about, but one part will ring in your ears with its greatness. Jefferson wrote:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

That was plain language in the 18th century, but you might have

a Declaration by the Representatives of the UMTED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.

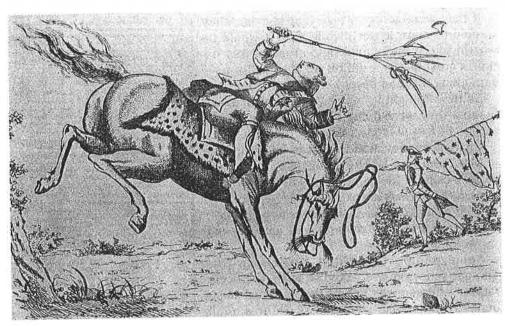
When in the course of human world it becomes necessary for it propped to dissible the policy of the property of the policy of the policy of the course of the case separately than the policy of the policy of the course of the case of the course of the case the policy of the policy of the course of the case of the case of the policy of the case of the policy of the case of the cas

The first draft of the Declaration of Independence, in Jefferson's handwriting.

You can find the complete text of the Declaration of Independence on page 190.

Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.

-- MOTTO ON THOMAS JEFFERSON'S SEAL, CIRCA 1776 King George, in an English cartoon, as the helpless rider of "The horse America, throwing his Master."



#### Dates to Remember—or Else!

1215: Magna Carta
1492: Columbus sails to
America
1607: Jamestown settled
at Plymouth
at Plymouth
1776: the Declaration of
Independence!

Here's another date for your memory bank: 1610: when Spanish speakers founded Santa Fe, New Mexico. to read it a few times to understand it. It is worth doing. Those words are worth memorizing.

All men are created equal.

Just what does "equal" mean?

Are we all the same? Look around you. Of course we aren't. Some of us are smarter than others, and some of us are better athletes, and some of us are better looking, and some are nicer. But none of that matters, said Jefferson. We are all equal in the eyes of God, and we are all entitled to equal rights: the right to live, the right to be free, the right to be able to try to find the kind of life that will make us happy.

And that is the whole reason for having governments, he said. Governments are not made to make kings happy. They are for the benefit of the people who are being governed. Governments should have "the consent of the governed."

Sometimes, when ideas are written down, they take on meanings that go beyond what the writers intended. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was great from the moment he wrote it, but it has grown even greater with the passing of time. He said "all men are created equal." He didn't mention women. Did he mean to include women? No one knows. Perhaps not. We do know that in the 18th century the words "men" and "mankind" included men and women. But very few people, except for Tom Paine, thought much about

women's rights. It was the 20th century before women in America had the right to vote.

Did Thomas Jefferson mean to include black men when he said "all men"? Historians sometimes argue about that. You'll have to decide for yourself.

In 1776, when Jefferson wrote the Declaration, he included a long section in which he described slavery as a "cruel war against human nature." Yet Jefferson lived in a slave society and owned slaves himself.

He thought slavery was wrong, and he said so. "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free," wrote Jefferson. Many congressmen agreed. John Adams spoke out strongly against slavery. Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush founded the first antislavery society in the New World. But South Carolina and Georgia would not sign the Declaration if it contained the antislavery section. So Jefferson's antislavery words were taken out. The delegates compromised.

Should they have gone ahead without those southern colonies? That would have meant that the Deep South would not have joined in the fight against England. It might have meant defeat for the proposed union of states.

Jefferson and Adams and Franklin and others thought the Union

was more important than the issue of slavery. They knew that staying with England would not bring freedom to the slaves. They thought slavery could be dealt with later. Do you agree with them?

Those were tough decisions the delegates were making.

It took a civil war to end slavery. Do you think that war could have been avoided? Do you think the delegates should have acted differently in 1776?

Of one thing you can be sure. Today, when people all over the world read Jefferson's words, they understand them to mean all people—men, women, and children—of all colors and beliefs.

The appointment of a woman to office is an innovation for which the public is not prepared, nor am I.

—THOMAS JEFFERSON TO ALBERT GALLATIN, 1807



In 1776 Arthur Middleton (*left*), of South Carolina, owned more than 50,000 acres and 800 slaves. He also signed the Declaration of Independence.

# **All Men Are Created Equal**

The words of the Declaration of Independence are so clear—all men are created equal—that they leave no way to explain slavery. No one anticipated that.

The Declaration was meant to tell why we were breaking away from England. But it did much more than that. Jefferson's words had a power that no one at the time foresaw.

For Benjamin Banneker they spoke in a special way. Banneker was an African-American, but he was not a slave. He grew up on a small tobacco farm in Maryland and learned to read and write at a nearby Quaker school. After that, he borrowed books from a neighbor and eventually taught himself calculus and trigonometry and astronomy and surveying (an incredible feat of self-education). When he was 21, he designed and built a wooden clock-even though he had never seen one up close. He carved it with a knife and it worked accurately for 50 years.

Like Jefferson, he played the violin and was an Enlightenment thinker, which means he had broad interests and a lot of curiosity. All his life, Banneker kept reading and learning. He published yearly almanacs—calendars—with weather predictions, projections of tides, information on the moon and stars, and daily comments. Almanacs were popular; Benjamin Franklin

had become wealthy as the writer and publisher of one.

ration was proclaimed, Banneker sent Thomas Jefferson a copy of his almanac, along with a letter reminding Jefferson of his now famous words—all men are created equal. Then he said he had heard that Jefferson was friendly toward blacks and not inflexible in his thinking. Here is part of Banneker's letter:

Now, sir, if this is founded in truth, I apprehend you will readily embrace every opportunity to eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and opinions, which so generally prevails with respect to us [blacks], and that your sentiments are concurrent with mine, which are that one universal Father hath given Being to us all, and that he hath not only made us all of one flesh, but that he hath also without partiality afforded us all the same sensations, and endued us all with the same faculties, and that however variable we may be in society or religion, however diversified in situation or color, we are all of the same family, and stand in the same relation to him.

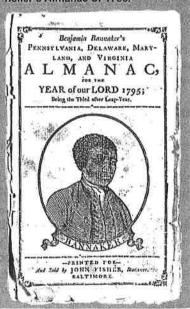
And here is Thomas Jefferson's reply:

Sir,—I thank you sincerely for your letter of the 19th instant, and for the Almanac it contained. Nobody wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given our black brethren talents equal to those of other colours of men, and that the appearance of a want of them is owing only to the degraded condition of their existence, both in Africa and America. I can add with truth that no one wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced for raising the condition both of their body and mind to what it ought to be.

I am, with great esteem, Sir, your most obedient humble servant,

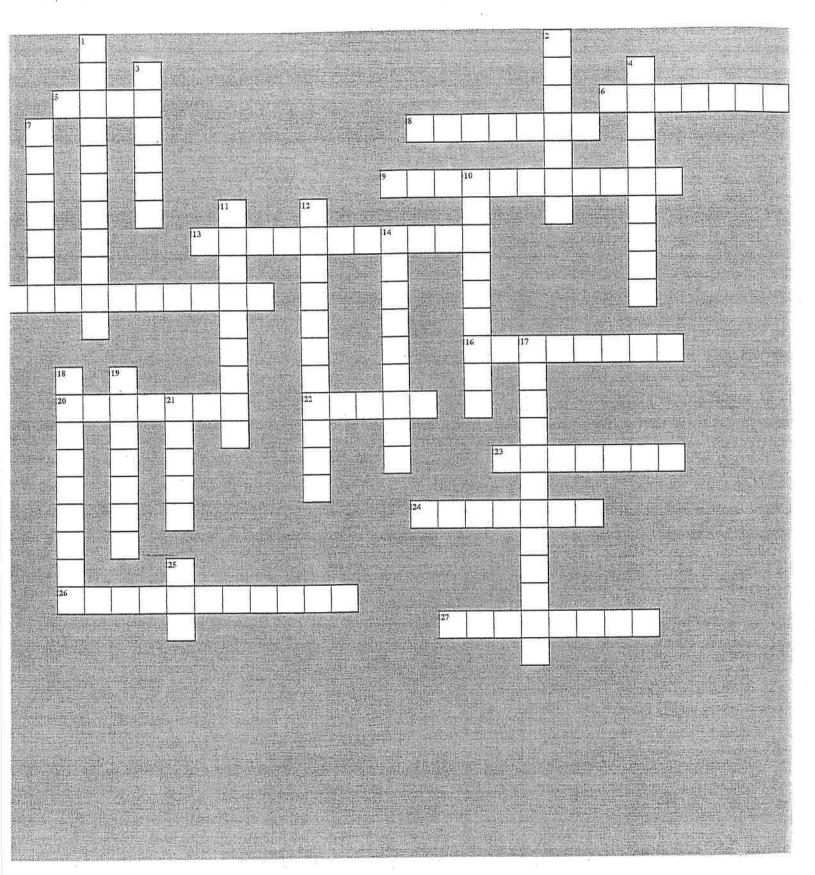
Th: Jefferson

In 1791, Benjamin Banneker sent Thomas Jefferson a copy of his first almanac, in which he argued against ideas of black inferiority. This is the title page from Banneker's Almanac of 1795.



# Firebrands & Declaring Independence

Complete the crossword puzzle,



### Across By 1760, with good winds and good luck. vou could sail from Baltimore to London in weeks "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me \_ or give me death!" -- Patrick Henry The statue of George III in Manhattan's Bowling Green was pulled down and later melted and turned into 9 Who did Thomas Paine m*e*t. London and afterwards knew he wanted to go to America. 13 When Thomas Paine was a boy he was apprenticed to a Know your dates! In 15 1215 the \_\_\_\_\_ was written. On July 4, 1776 the members of the Second Continental Congress the Declaration of Independence. 20 Thomas Jefferson loved serious music and (Jac. word) one of the largest collections of sheet music in America. He played the violin

almost every day until

first to sign his name on

When Jefferson wrote

included a long section

in which he described

was the

as a "cruel

the day he died.

"...that all men are

created \_\_\_\_\_

the Declaration of

the Declaration he

war against human

nature."

Independence

22

23

24

26	Who started the committees of
	correspondence and the Sons of Liberty? full name
27	signing the declaration made the delegates  + to England.
Down	
1	Three important men who played a key role in
	getting the revolution going were Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry and
2	The Common Sense Pamphlet stated that Great Britain was the colonists' economy with taxes and
	trade restrictions.
3	"We hold these to be self-evident"
4	John of Pennsylvania wouldn't sign the declaration
7	South Carolina and would not

sign the declaration if it

Someone who can light

a fire in people's minds

revolution can be called

Ben Franklin improved

mail delivery. These new

was a great

the roads to help with

orator and a fighter for

Greece. Patrick Henry

was compared to him.

colonists to think of

rather than English

When Paine arrived to

a writer and magazine editor in what city?

America he got a job as

themselves as

colonists

It took a long time for the

freedom in ancient

roads were called

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contained the

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antislavery section

- 18 "....that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of
- 19 In the 18th century the words "men" and "\_\_\_\_\_" included men and women.
- 21 "These are the times that try men's \_\_\_\_" -- Thomas Paine
- 25 Thomas Jefferson was chosen to write the draft of the declaration of independence. John Adams told Jefferson, "You can write \_\_\_\_\_ times better than I can."