

## TENNESSEE SUPPLEMENT

Robert B. Beam, P.C., Editor  
200 Tower Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37912  
beamerkt@yahoo.com



Clarence Loyd Crump  
Grand Commander

### THE POWER OF WORDS

Throughout our history, there are many days that celebrate what it means to be American. Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day, and Veterans' Day pay tribute to those who fight or have fought to keep our country free. Labor Day recognizes the contributions of our workers, those who produce the goods and services that make our economy strong. Celebrations such as St. Patrick's Day and Cinco de Mayo celebrate that we are a nation of immigrants. In June we have Flag Day, the day when the American Flag, the symbol of our Nation, was adopted.

In Independence Day, Americans unite to recall the birth of our Country. There are a number of dates that were significant during the Revolutionary Era and the War of Independence, but July 4<sup>th</sup> is the date we point to as when we became free.

It is as important to note what this day is not, as what it is. In some countries, the national holiday is the date of a particular battle, in which the nation defeated the army of the oppressor. The battles of Bunker Hill, Saratoga, or Yorktown could have been selected – but they were not. Other countries point to when their government was established; in our own history, this might have been the adoption of the Articles of Confederation in 1777. Perhaps the date of the signing of the Treaty of Paris, by which Britain formally recognized the independence of the United States in 1783 could have been chosen. None of these dates, however, mark our Independence Day.

The United States marks its beginning from the day a group of men did something extraordinary; simply put, the date when they declared themselves to be free. It was not a military victory, the establishment of a form of government, or the recognition by the mother country which marked our beginning. It was an act of will, a statement to the world, and the signing of a document that declared,

*"...these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States..."*

We cannot forget the significance of that moment. John Adams believed that our national Independence Day would be July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the date on which the Continental Congress approved the resolution calling for independence. He predicted that we would celebrate the vote, the decision itself; in essence we do, but the date is that on which the Declaration of Independence was adopted – the written document setting forth the causes for independence, stating that "all Men are created equal" and endowed by their Creator with "Life Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," and declaring to the world that the United Colonies were now the United STATES.

This was more than a vote on independence. It was a statement to the King of England, to the American people, and to the world. The Declaration of Independence lays out in flowing language our basic belief in freedom and natural rights given by God and not by a monarch, in the idea that all men share one Creator, and that governments derive their authority from the consent of the governed. These were radical ideas that never before been actually attempted in practice. Ideas that ran counter to history. Ideas that no one knew would even work. Ideas that could cost them their lives, for they were treason.

These men of the Continental Congress put their names to this document, and in doing so put at risk everything they held dear. The closing words of the Declaration made that clear: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

The Declaration of Independence is more than a statement of freedom from Britain. It incorporates some of the main political ideas of the Enlightenment, that government exists to serve the people and not the reverse; that governments are only legitimate so long as they uphold the Natural Rights of mankind and keep men free. The Declaration has become the model for all subsequent documents on which free countries are based, and was the blueprint for the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

As we celebrate Independence Day, we should take a moment to read this document, and look at it as though for the first time. And, we should strive to uphold its ideals, as those Patriots did, with our Lives, or Fortunes, and sacred Honor.