

THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS - THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS - 1774

CONVENED AS A RESULT OF GOVERNMENT'S VIOLATIONS OF THE LAW AND ITS REFUSAL TO LISTEN AND RESPOND TO THE PEOPLE'S PETITIONS FOR REDRESS.

In September 1774, citizens from Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island sent representatives to Philadelphia in what was to be called a Continental Congress. They were referred to as "delegates"

The purpose of their assembly was two-fold: First, they wanted to establish the fact that their central government was rapidly degenerating into an unrestrained tyranny. After 150 years, the authorities of all of "Great Britain," had begun to violate the Rights of the Englishmen in the colonies. The first gathering in Philadelphia seemed a necessity after eleven years of earnest effort to express their concerns to the government through the given legal right to Petition for Redress (remedy) of grievances. This long-standing right had been in place and freely exercised since 1215, as the Law given to The People of Britain through the Magna Carta. With government officials refusing to listen or respond to the petitions, the 1774 gathering was a natural, necessary next step in the path to Liberty.

Second, these representatives wanted to discuss and discern what meaningful steps the free people of the thirteen British colonies might take, within the law, to remedy the situation and end the government's use of arbitrary power and oppression.

It's important to note that the delegates did not go to Philadelphia to declare their independence. They did not go there to separate from Great Britain. They did not intend to seize anything from the government or to "distrain upon or assail" the government in any way. There was no predetermined outcome. Their assembly in Philadelphia was solely intended to determine what non-violent, legal action the Delegates could recommend to bring the central government back under the law.

The Founding Fathers determined the People of Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, Georgia and Rhode Island possessed both a fundamental legal Right and the practical means to effectively hold the government accountable to the Rule of Law, non-violently, and without further reliance upon the "despised" Petitions for redress, and without having to seize anything from the government - all by simply retaining their money (property).

The first action they decided on was non-importation. Colonies would make every effort not to purchase goods from the British. To make sure of this, the Congress set up an organization called the Association to police trade activity.

A declaration of colonial rights was also drafted and sent to London. This took a while. Most of the debate during this meeting revolved around defining the colonies' relationship with mother England. Joseph Galloway of Pennsylvania proposed an imperial union with Britain. Under this program, all acts of Parliament would have to be approved by an American assembly to take effect. If they had tried it, this type of change might have delayed the Revolution. But, the delegations voted against it — by one vote.

The Congress also agreed to meet again in May 1775 if their issues were not resolved. This was a major step in creating a decision-making group to regularly represent the colonies. It was the first time this happened in colonial history.

At this meeting, at Carpenter Hall in Philadelphia, America came together politically for the first time on a national level and the first seeds of democracy were sown.

1. What was the primary reason why the colonists decided to send their leaders to Philadelphia in September and October of 1774?
2. Ultimately, what did the Congress decide to do?
3. What do you think this meeting meant to the British King?