

*For title & contents see vol. 6*  
**POTTER'S AMERICAN MONTHLY.**

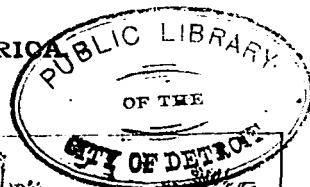
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**THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS OF AMERICA**

By BENSON J. LOSSING, LL.D.



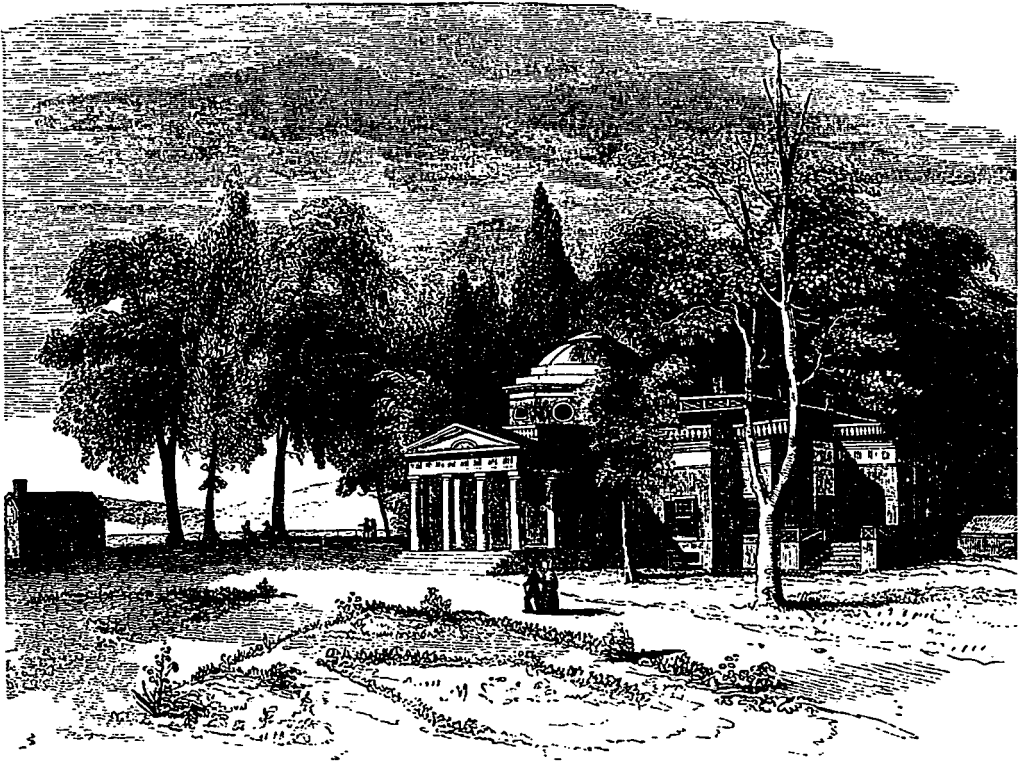
THE STATE-HOUSE AND INDEPENDENCE SQUARE, FROM FIFTH STREET.

050.P55  
DETROIT

1776—1826—1876.

## THE GREAT COMMITTEE, AND ITS GREAT CHAIRMAN OF THE "MASTERLY PEN."

By NELLIE HESS MORRIS.



RESIDENCE OF THOMAS JEFFERSON, MONTICELLO, VIRGINIA.

**July 4th, 1776**—The Declaration of Independence, written by THOMAS JEFFERSON and amended by JOHN ADAMS, was ratified by the Delegates from Thirteen United Colonies in Congress assembled; by this Declaration, the Congress *declared* to the world the grounds upon which they had, in the resolution of Independence, severed the political bonds with the British Empire, and made the Thirteen Colonies a new Nation of Free and Independent States.

**July 4th, 1826**—the fiftieth anniversary of the consummation of the grandest work of their lives, but two or three hours though many miles apart, died THOMAS JEFFERSON and JOHN ADAMS, full of

years and honors, having each been awarded the highest official honors the Republic could bestow, and having each lived to see the Nation they had done so much towards establishing, prosperous and on the high-road to the proud rank it holds among the Nations of the world, to day—

**July 4th, 1876**—when all peoples of the earth gladly come to visit the City of our Republic's Birth, that they may unite with the happy millions of her own people in celebrating the One-Hundredth Birthday of the American Nation, and in giving our good Ship of State (or *States*) a glorious send-off on her Second Centennial Cruise.

During our extended Six-months' Birthday

Party, it is our right, as Americans, to rejoice and be "exceeding glad," to shout and even to exult in the marvelous history of our Nation's trials and triumphs during its first century; but if we are wise we shall not forget or ignore the fact that "the Lord reigneth" and that the Almighty "hath done great things for us" as a Nation, "whereof we are glad;" it is He that "hath made us glad through His works," and we should "give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name." If it would be ungrateful to forget George Washington, James Otis, Samuel and John Adams, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris, and the other noble patriots of a hundred years ago, how much more ungrateful to forget Him who raised up these mighty men, as His own instruments, and appointed unto each his part and portion in the vast work of founding a new and mighty Nation upon the rock of truth and justice and freedom—not upon the quicksand of *licence* or *licentiousness* as some would have us pervert *liberty*; it would be a sad token of ingratitude to the Supreme Ruler on the part of a specially favored people for us to dishonor the day set apart to His honor. We have one hundred and fifty-seven days for our Centennial Ceremonies; let us not "rob God" of His twenty-six.

The story of the months of June, July and August, 1776, of the proposal, preparation, adoption and signing of the Declaration of Independence has been told and so often retold, that I need not give it here in detail, especially as I have had my turn in repeating it a year ago in these pages.<sup>1</sup> I shall only note the items which I cannot avoid to enable me to treat my present theme intelligibly:

It will be recollected that, after two days' discussion, the Resolution of Independence, offered on the 7th of June, by Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia, under instructions of the Convention of that Colony, was laid over until the 1st of the ensuing July, in the hope of securing unanimity in the Congress in its favor; that, to avoid needless loss of time, a Committee of Five was appointed to prepare a "Declaration of Independence" to accompany, and elucidate or explain the grounds of, the Resolution; that the Committee consisted of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Ben-

jamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston and Roger Sherman; that the Chairman, Mr. Jefferson, wrote the immortal document, Mr. Adams personally revising it and making several amendments; that the entire paper was critically analyzed, each sentence, nay, each word, carefully weighed, and many amendments made, ere the "Declaration" was finally adopted by the Congress; that the "Declaration" was signed voluntarily by nearly all the Delegates; that the Congress subsequently decided that it should be engrossed on parchment, and that every Delegate should be *required* to sign the engrossed copy; that the engrossed copy was accordingly signed by the Delegates present, on the 2d of August, and that Matthew Thornton, who was not elected a Delegate until September, and did not take his seat until November, was granted the special privilege of signing in the latter month.<sup>2</sup>

My purpose in commencing this paper was to offer a brief sketch of Thomas Jefferson, but it may be interesting to many of my readers to accompany it with a few words concerning his co-committeemen. These five men constituted the most important Committee of American, if not of all, History, and we can readily believe that no man was placed upon it without ample assurance of his eminent fitness as a patriot of the purest and most unquestionable principles. Three of the five, Dr. Franklin, John Adams and Roger Sherman, were natives of Massachusetts; Thomas Jefferson, of Virginia, and Robert R. Livingston, of New York City. The last named was the youngest of the quintette, being not yet thirty years old; Mr. Jefferson was but thirty-three; Roger Sherman was a little past fifty-five; John Adams in the prime of his manhood, in his forty-first year, and Dr. Franklin was already an old man, past the allotted three-score-and-ten-years' limit, though hale, hearty and vigorous, with his mind alert, his head clear, his heart warm, in the interest of the coming Nation at whose birth he was to be more than an interested spectator.

The venerable philosopher and sage, Benjamin Franklin, had won distinction, not only as a man of science and letters, but in public life as Clerk of the General Assembly of the Province of Penn-

<sup>1</sup> See MONTHLY for July, 1875, under caption "The Birth of the American Republic, Ninety-nine Years Ago."

<sup>2</sup> Quite a number of the "Signers" were elected subsequently to the 4th of July, and hence had not voted for the Declaration, but were permitted to sign and thus pledge their honor and lives to its maintenance.

sylvania, as postmaster of Philadelphia, and as Deputy Postmaster-General of the British-American Colonies, years before the first gathering of the Revolutionary clouds over his country's horizon; he had distinguished himself by success in a diplomatic mission to the Mother Country in behalf of the people in a contest between them and the Proprietaries; he was a member for some years of the Provincial General Assembly, until, in 1764, he was sent again to England as agent to represent the Colony in the controversies which preceded, and culminated in, the great controversy at arms; but when it became evident that diplomacy must give place to war as the final arbiter of the issue, he had hastened home. Upon his arrival in Philadelphia, the 5th of May, 1775, he was immediately made a delegate to the Congress which was to assemble on the 10th.

John Adams was from the commencement of the efforts of the British ministry to circumscribe the liberties and defy the chartered rights of the American Colonies, one of the most advanced and most pronounced champions of his country and countrymen, and early took a most active part in the controversy; so conspicuous was he among the radical patriots that in 1773 and again in 1774, his election to the Provincial Council was negatived by the royal governor. He was a delegate to the First Continental Congress and was returned to the Second; in both he was recognized as one of the most advanced, as well as among the ablest, purest and most influential members.

Roger Sherman was born in Newton, Massachusetts, where he followed the trade of a shoemaker until after his twenty-second year, after his father's death supporting his mother and several younger children; but during all this time he was a diligent student, mathematics being his favorite study; in 1743 he removed to New Milford, Connecticut, and two years later secured the appointment of county surveyor of public lands. At length, having studied law, he was admitted to the bar in 1754, served several terms in the Provincial Assembly, and, in 1759, was appointed a judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and removing to New Haven in 1761, was here appointed to the same high judicial position, and was later raised to the bench of the Superior Court. His positive attitude in favor of the patriot cause won the confidence of the people, and he was one of the Delegates from Connecticut to the

First Continental Congress, was returned to the Second, and was reelected from time to time until the ratification of the Constitution of the United States, when he was for two years a Representative in the House and then was made a member of the United States Senate, which position he still filled with high credit at the time of his death, in 1793.

Robert R. Livingston was descended from a Scottish family, the head of which was the Earl of Livingstone; while still young he had secured a large practice at the New York bar, and, in 1773, was appointed Recorder of the City. Neither official nor social position, however, could restrain his ardor as a patriot, and, in 1775, he was removed from the recordership; he was immediately elected to the Assembly, and thence sent to the Continental Congress, where he had great influence in consequence of his unflinching patriotism and great learning and ability. Although a member of the Committee to prepare the Declaration and a warm friend and advocate of Independence, Mr. Livingston did not sign the great paper after its adoption; at this late day, it is difficult to determine why he did not sign, and, especially as I can find no reason assigned, I am constrained to conclude that he must have been absent at the time of signing, possibly, like Mr. Tilghman, of Maryland, employed in some other duty for the welfare of his State.

Thomas Jefferson, the Chairman of this important Committee, and the actual writer of the most important State paper in the annals of our Republic and one of the noblest specimens of masterly composition the world has ever been privileged to read, was still a young man of but three months more than thirty-three years. He was a son of Virginia, the patriotic and courageous Colony which he in part so ably represented, and was of Welsh and Scottish descent. A law-pupil of George Wythe, he early attained marked success at the bar, and a political pupil of Patrick Henry, he was not slow to learn to emulate his great teacher in the advocacy of the most advanced views of liberty and of the most aggressive modes and means of securing colonial rights. When but twenty-six years of age, he was elected to the Provincial Legislature, and at once acquired influence far beyond his years. As the controversy with the Mother Country waxed hot and fierce, Mr. Jefferson became one of the most valued

champions of the American cause, and, young as he was, he soon was a recognized leader in the councils of the Virginia patriots; his natural abilities were of the highest order, and his patriotism of the most fearless, aggressive type, in perfect accord with Henry, the greatest of the leaders of the Old Dominion, if not indeed of the Continent—Henry had no peer as an orator and Jefferson had few as a writer, and thus these two were peculiarly fitted to work together, shoulder to shoulder, in the van of the great struggle for Independence. Mr. Jefferson was not a delegate to the First Congress, but was still one of the most prized members of the Colonial House of Burgesses until that body was finally dissolved by the royal governor, Dunmore; when the Convention of Virginia, the first Assembly independent indeed in defiance of the royal authority, was elected by the people, he was of the number elected, and, though prevented attending by a severe attack of illness, took an active interest in its deliberations, sending a paper embodying his views; when the Convention reassembled in March, 1775, he was present, and a fearless, outspoken advocate of the most thoroughly radical measures, an able and daring second to Patrick Henry. He especially distinguished himself as the writer of certain important papers for the body, which gained him, as John Adams tells us, "the reputation of a masterly pen" and "the character of a fine writer." At length, a vacancy occurred in the delegation from Virginia to the Congress, arising from Peyton Randolph's resignation, and Mr. Jefferson was elected and took his seat in the Congress on the 21st of June, 1775; his "reputation" had preceded him, and he was forthwith placed on some of the most important committees. When, on the 11th of June, 1776, the Congress selected the Committee to draft the Declaration of Independence, Mr. Jefferson was selected as one of the five, and his four associates constituted him the Chairman and required him to exercise his "masterly pen" in the writing of the great document.

Such were the immortal five composing the Committee to draft the grand Chart of our Liberties.

Upon coming to Philadelphia, Mr. Jefferson had arranged to board at the Indian Queen Tavern, then a famous hostelry on Fourth street a little below Market (then High) street. Being

an ardent lover of country scenery and quiet, he sought two rooms of fair dimensions and found them in the house of Mr. Jacob Graff, "on High street 16 foot 8 inches west of the Seventh street from the Delaware;" the house was delightfully situated in a lovely spot, surrounded by beautiful trees, but a short walk from the State-House and yet sufficiently removed from the built-up portions of the city to insure quiet and fresh air; the two rooms served him, the one for a bedroom and the other for a parlor and study; in the latter he was wont to write, and here he wrote the "Declaration." Here, from day to day, the Committee met to talk over the several points in the paper in their hands for preparation, and to counsel and advise their Chairman in this the most important work of his life. Hither too, no doubt, as Judge Peters intimates, notable patriots, other than those of the Committee, were wont to come, to canvass the great questions involved in the war, especially the necessity and practicability of independence and the ways and means of achieving it. One who visits the *locale* to-day, can scarcely realize its aspect a hundred years ago—the house still stands, but it is now in the midst of a closely and compactly built business centre, flanked on either side by stores, and itself suggesting no thought of quiet, luxurious retirement, or of an out-of-town home—such as it was when the great Virginian abode there. The upper windows tell of the olden time, but the store on the first floor does not even tell us of the country-store established there by Jacob Hiltzheimer a year after Mr. Jefferson had gone back to his Monticello, and when the thriving young bricklayer, Jacob Graff, had sold the house, with the vacant lots on the corner and in its rear, to the enterprising yeoman, Jacob Hiltzheimer—nor even does it speak of the later ownership of the property by Simon Gratz, except that its front shows us that the latter wanted more room and added a fourth floor in common to this "new three-story brick house," and to its corner neighbor.

The question has often been answered, how it came about that Mr. Jefferson was selected to write the "Declaration of Independence," and I need not go over the whole story, but may tell all that is requisite in a single sentence: The mover of the Resolution, Richard Henry Lee, was an eloquent orator and an outspoken fearless patriot, but not specially strong with the pen; John

Adams was both a ready speaker and a ready writer, but he deemed it expedient that the actual writing of the great document should be done by a Virginian in order to increase the possibilities of unanimity in the adoption of the paper, and Mr. Jefferson had brought to the Congress a peculiar reputation as wielding a "masterly pen" and being a marvelously "fine writer;" hence, when it was suggested that he should write the great paper, he promptly assigned the task to his younger Virginia colleague. But it is a straining of the truth to call Mr. Jefferson the *author* of the Declaration—he was such only in a limited measure, for his co-committeemen were not the men to leave to him the unaided composition of so important a paper, the responsibility of preparing which had been assigned to them jointly as a Committee; doubtless, his "masterly pen" controlled the phraseology and shaped the paper as a whole, but not without more counsel and advice from his associates than is consistent with the idea of his being the *author*.

Dr. Franklin lived to see the Revolutionary struggle happily terminated in the assured and recognized independence of his country, towards which happy consummation he was, in his old age, enabled to accomplish as much as any one of his younger compatriots.

Independence had changed the entire aspect of the great war, and had improved the attitude of the American States, removing the semblance of rebel subjects opposing their lawful government and imparting the juster character of a Nation nobly battling for its liberty against foreign tyrants seeking its enslavement. Even the British government felt and in a degree recognized this important result of the mere "declaration," other foreign powers evidently appreciated it, and our own Congress and the people universally realized the grand fact. Measures were at once initiated to turn this great advantage to the best account, by asserting our rights as a Nation to a place among the Nations of the earth; the first government to be approached with a view to securing its complete recognition and its aid in the final establishment of the independence declared, was naturally France, and there was no one in our country so well calculated successfully to carry on the negotiations as Dr. Franklin; hence, in October, 1776, he was appointed Commissioner to the French Court, and notwithstanding his advanced age, he promptly

accepted the trust. The French Government, and the people as well, received him with distinguished honors, and were profuse in their expressions of personal regard and of sympathy with our new-born Nation in her trials and noble efforts, and no doubt they were friendly to the young Republic in so far as they were intensely hostile to its enemy; but the Monarch and his Ministry were very cautious and temporized until the news of the surrender of Burgoyne gave a brighter aspect to our affairs, when at last they entered into the long-deferred formal negotiations and in February, 1778, the veteran patriot consummated his work in the conclusion of a treaty. Dr. Franklin remained as ambassador at the Court of France until 1785, bearing a conspicuous part in the negotiation of the treaty of peace with Great Britain; on the 30th of November, 1782, he signed at Paris, the preliminary articles, and on the 3d of September, 1783, united with Adams and Jay in signing the definitive treaty of peace, by which the Mother Country acknowledged the Freedom and Independence of her American offspring—a proud day must it have been to the aged diplomat when he thus helped to set the seal of completion to the Independence he had seven years before aided in *declaring*. Subsequently he effected a treaty with Prussia, and, in 1785, he retired from diplomatic life and returned home; he was of course received with enthusiastic demonstrations of gratitude and respect.

In 1786, notwithstanding his great age (he was eighty years old), he accepted the office of President of Pennsylvania, which he filled with credit for three years. He was also an active member of the Convention which formed the Constitution of the United States. He passed from the scenes of his long and useful life on the 17th of April, 1790, aged eighty-four years and and three months. His last public act was the signing of a memorial to the Congress by the Abolition Society of which he was the founder and the President. The Philadelphia Library and the American Philosophical Society are perpetual monuments of Dr. Franklin's public spirit and enlightened efforts to promote the true welfare of the people, while the Pennsylvania Hospital and the University of Pennsylvania justly claim him as one of the most conspicuous of their founders.

I have said that John Adams personally revised

and amended the Declaration of Independence—his was the only hand, besides that of the Chairman and writer, seen on the document. But, as my readers know, there was not the unanimity in the Congress in favor of the immediate declaration of independence which was so desirable in order to give the act due weight at home and abroad, and upon John Adams devolved the leadership of its advocates—he had to lead the warm discussion in behalf of the immediate adoption of the Resolution and the Declaration of Independence, and ably did he perform this important duty. He was at this time, also a member of the Committee of Foreign Relations, President of the Board of War, and Chairman of the Committee to decide admiralty cases appealed from State Courts. In November, 1777, he was sent to supersede Deane as a Commissioner at the Court of France, but at his suggestion Franklin was made sole ambassador, and he returned home in season to assist in the framing of a State Constitution for Massachusetts.

In 1779 he went once more to France as a Minister to treat with Great Britain for peace; finding efforts in this direction premature, he was about to return home, when a commission reached him, from the Congress, empowering him to repair to Holland to negotiate a treaty of amity and commerce and to obtain a loan; he effected this mission. In 1782 he went again to Paris, and participated with Franklin and Jay in the final treaty of peace with the British Government. In 1785 he was fully commissioned as Ambassador at the Court of St. James, which he resigned in 1788. His subsequent career as Vice-President and President of the United States is too well known to require detailing here. He retired from public life in 1801. In 1825 he had the exceptional happiness of seeing his son elevated to the Presidency; and on the 4th day of July, 1826, he went to his rest.

Robert R. Livingston served alternately in the General Congress and in the State Congress until 1781, when he was appointed, under the Articles of Confederation, Secretary for Foreign Affairs; upon his retirement from this office, in 1783, he was honored with a warm vote of thanks by the Congress for the signal ability and diligence he had displayed. He then accepted the position of Chancellor of the State of New York; was a member

of the Constitutional Convention in 1787; and he it was who in 1789 administered the oath of office to George Washington on his inauguration as President of the United States. In 1801 he was appointed by President Jefferson Minister to the Court of France, and as such in 1802 concluded the treaty by which the extensive territory of Louisiana was ceded to the United States. He continued actively in public life until 1812, and died at Clermont, New York, February 26th, 1813. I have not space to notice his valuable services to his country in the departments of Science and Art—they were so numerous and valuable that justice would demand more space than my entire paper occupies. He was an accomplished writer, an eloquent orator, an able legislator and politician, and above all a pure, earnest Christian.

Thomas Jefferson retired from the Congress in October, 1776, and devoted himself to revising and remodeling the organic laws of his native State. In 1779 he was elected Governor, and in 1783 returned to the Congress, wherein his services were invaluable though brief. In May, 1784, he was appointed a co-commissioner with Franklin and Adams to negotiate treaties of amity and commerce with foreign powers, and in 1785 succeeded Dr. Franklin as Minister Plenipotentiary at the French Court. His success as a diplomatist augmented his already great fame at home and abroad as a publicist, and his popularity at home as a faithful American. He returned home in 1789 and accepted the office of Secretary of State in President Washington's administration. The history of his association with Washington's cabinet is one that I do not care to dwell upon, as it tarnishes his hitherto noble repute—his continuance in the cabinet while persistently scheming and plotting against the great Chief and his trusted advisers, and his actually descending to shameless slanders against those with whom he differed, are dark blots upon his character. At last he resigned, December 31st, 1793, and became the leader of the Republican Party as distinguished from the old Federal Party. I need not detail the story of his services as Vice-President with John Adams, or of his two terms as President of the United States; he retired from public office at the expiration of his second term in 1809, but continued to take an active interest in political affairs for years afterwards.