

WILLIAM M. FOWLER

For the real birthplace of the Revolution, look to Malden

THOMAS JEFFERSON might have learned something from the citizens of Malden.

Several weeks before he finished drafting the Declaration of Independence, the people of that town had already made up their minds that they would be free and independent. Long before the men in Philadelphia voted on "this momentous issue," the people of Malden had decided to commit their own lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to the cause of American independence.

It had not been an easy decision. Since the events of April 19, 1775, in Lexington and Concord, the people of Malden had watched events closely.

In the weeks following those battles, militia gathered around Boston and laid siege to the British. Malden men marched to join

the new army forming under the command of General Washington.

Those left at home faced other challenges as they worked to preserve order amid growing uncertainty. Special town meetings were convened to discuss the crisis. Debate was heated. Were they still loyal Englishmen? Did the king deserve their allegiance? Why did king and Parliament ignore their petitions? Why would they not hear American grievances? Their answer came at Bunker Hill at the end of British bayonets. That bloody day helped steel their courage.

The siege of Boston lasted nearly a year. In March 1776 Henry Knox arrived from Fort Ticonderoga with cannon and mounted them on Dorchester Heights, where their muzzles could look down on the British. Facing de-

feat, the enemy evacuated the town. Sentiment for independence was rising in Massachusetts, and in May the Provincial Congress asked the towns "to express their minds with respect to the important question of American independence."

Malden was the first to respond. On Monday, May 27, 1776, the freemen of Malden declared by a unanimous vote that "it is the ardent wish of our souls that America may become a free and independent state."

In a ringing denunciation of arbitrary power the people of Malden exclaimed that they would not be taxed without their consent. They would have "no further connection with a king who can unfeelingly hear of the slaughter of his subjects."

He and his political henchmen

were "villains who have trampled upon the sacred rights of men." Malden "renounced with disdain" their connection to such a king, and they "bid a final adieu to Britain."

Malden's declaration helped burst the dam. Within a few days, several other towns added their voices to the cry for independence. The people of Newburyport pledged "their lives and fortunes" to the cause. From Pittsfield came the message that the citizens of that town looked to the Continental Congress for a "declaration of independence."

In Philadelphia the Massachusetts delegates rejoiced at the courage of their countrymen. John Adams and his cousin Samuel were strong advocates of independence as were the other three members of the delegation —

John Hancock, Elbridge Gerry, and Robert Treat Paine. Eagerly these men read and shared newspaper accounts and letters from home with other delegates hoping to encourage them to follow the bold example of Massachusetts.

Near the end of his life a friend asked John Adams when he thought the American Revolution began. Was it on the second of July when the Congress voted independence? Or was it on the fourth when the Declaration was approved? Adams replied that neither event marked the beginning of the Revolution. "The Revolution," he said, "was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people."

Adams was right. The citizens of Malden, Newburyport, and Pittsfield did not need to read a

declaration written by men in Philadelphia to know that they "ought to be free and independent."

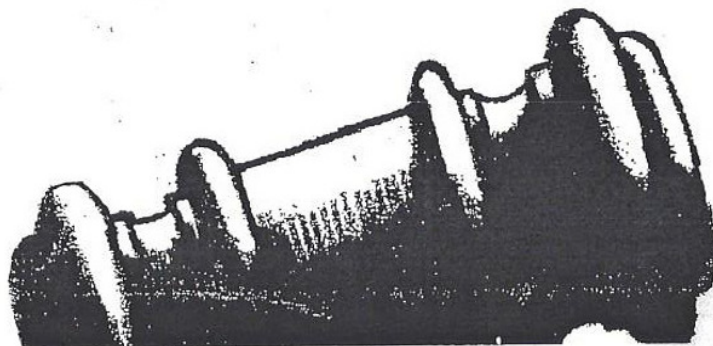
Jefferson's magnificent prose notwithstanding, American independence was neither declared nor achieved by the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia. It was expressed and won by the thousands of people like those in the towns of Massachusetts. They are the heroes who put their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor on the line.

We ought to remember what happened on the Fourth of July in Philadelphia, but that was a symbolic moment. The real events happened in places like Malden.

William M. Fowler is director of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

RALPH C. MARTIN II

Sometimes judges go too far



DAVID S. BRODER

Rising to the challenge

WASHINGTON THIS INDEPENDENCE Day holiday finds the United States preoccupied, as it has not been for a long time, with the generation that created the nation. It is not a notable anniversary;

sprang to life in the spring of 1789, many were disappointed. Compared with the members of the Continental Congress, the roughly 100 men assembled in the national capital were not too impressive. The appointments in