

American Congresses

Cheat Sheet

House of Burgesses (1619)

- Burgess originally meant freed man of a borough or burgh; later it meant an elected official
- This is the first form of representative government in the colonies. The House of Burgesses was the elected legislative assembly of the colony of Virginia and met for the first time in 1619;
- In 1769 the governor dissolved the assembly out of fear it was insubordinate to the king; many members began meeting in Raleigh Tavern where George Washington and Patrick Henry actually began making secret plans for a revolution

Albany Congress (1754)

- A meeting of seven colonies to discuss better relations with Indian tribes and common defense; the convention produced Benjamin Franklin's Albany Plan - an early attempt of a colonial union under the authority of the British
 - Colonies in attendance: Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island

Stamp Congress (1765)

- Congress that met in New York City on October 19, 1765. Nine of the 13 states sent delegates to discuss the recently passed Stamp Act. Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia and New Hampshire.
- The congress was held in secrecy and only one copy of the minutes has been preserved. The congress argued that Parliament could justly pass laws and taxes for Britain, but not for the colonies. They passed the Declaration of Rights and Grievances but refused to sign it, except for the clerk of course. Besides arguing against the Stamp Act the declaration said :
 - Only the colonial assemblies had a right to tax the colonies.
 - Trial by jury was a right, and the use of Admiralty Courts was abusive.
 - Colonists possessed all the Rights of Englishmen.
 - Without voting rights, Parliament could not represent the colonists.
- The declaration was sent to Britain on the same ship the stamps had arrived on. Parliament outright rejected the declaration

First Continental Congress (1774)

- Convention that met in September, 1774 at Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Twelve of thirteen colonies sent delegates; Georgia did not send any delegates because it was the newest colony and was seeking help from Britain to ease their smoldering border wars.
- The congress called for a second congressional meeting the following year and passed the following:

- *Declaration and Resolves* - outlined the colonial objections to the Intolerable Acts, listed a colonial bill of rights and provided a detailed list of grievances
- *Continental Association* - often called the "Association"; it was a system to organize a trade boycott with Britain; goal was to alter the relationship with Britain without severing ties
- *First Petition to King George III* - expressed loyalty to the King and hoped for redress of grievances relating to the Intolerable Acts

Second Continental Congress (1775)

- Convention of delegates from all thirteen colonies; the congress moved incrementally towards independence, adopted the Declaration of independence, managed the war effort and acted as the *de facto* government during the Revolutionary War.
- The congress passed the following measures:
 - *Olive Branch Petition* - (May, 1775) affirmed the loyalty of the colonies to the king and pleaded to avoid further conflict
 - *Declaration of Causes and the Necessity of Taking Up Arms* - (July, 1775) a document explaining why the colonies had taken up arms and begun the revolution
 - *Declaration of Independence* - (July 4, 1776) formal announcement for Britain as well as the world that the 13 North American colonies were independent
 - *Articles of Confederation* - (drafted in Nov, 1777 and adopted Mar, 1781) first constitution of the United States of America and legally established the United States

Confederation Congresses (1781-1789)

- Ten congresses were held under the Articles of Confederation constitution; despite major problems with the Articles, a few key laws were passed:
 - *Northwest Ordinance* - (Aug, 1789) created the first territory of the United States and set up the balancing act of free and slave states by banning slavery in the Northwest Territory

Constitutional Convention (1787)

- Convention was called to revise the Articles, but the delegates realized they needed to start over from scratch; proposals for the new government
 - *Virginia Plan* - representation was based on population and favored the large states
 - *New Jersey Plan* - provided for equal representation for all states
 - *Connecticut Compromise* - proposed a two house legislature that used both the Virginia and New Jersey Plans

Constitutional Congresses (1790-Present)

- Created the second government of the United States; made up of Senate and House; Senate gives equal representation to each state and the House representation is based on each state's population