# C:\Documents and Settings\Steven Saltzberg\My Documents\SOFTCHALK\V5 Lessons\Media - Jefferson\jeffpic3.jpgJefferson and the Declaration of Independence

Thomas Jefferson considered the Declaration of Independence his greatest achievement. Drafted in June of 1776, the Declaration of Independence expressed the ideals and philosophy that marked the beginning of self-government in America. Although most of the ideas featured in the Declaration were not new - in fact they were commonplace ideas of the time - Mr. Jefferson is known for the eloquence and passion of their expression.

### Early Life

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743 on a farm in Albemarle, Virginia. His ancestors were among the first settlers of the state of Virginia. His father, Peter, and his mother, Mary Randolph, had six daughters and two sons. Thomas was the elder of the sons. Jefferson's father Peter, a farmer and surveyor, died when Thomas was fairly young. Upon his death, the young Thomas Jefferson inherited a considerable estate, including the land where Jefferson later built his own family home, Monticello.

Jefferson attended school at the College of William and Mary, then practiced law and became the Albemarle County representative to the Virginia legislature. These activities helped prepare him for his task of authoring the Declaration of Independence.

### Philadelphia, 1776

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# The Continental Congress

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## Drafting the Constitution

A committee, comprised of Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman was give the task of writing a Declaration of Independence. The committee prevailed upon Jefferson to draft a document expressing their concerns and providing explanation as to why Independence was necessary.

Jefferson wrote the first draft in 2-3 days. The committee members made a total of forty-seven changes to the draft. After debating the draft in the Continental Congress, an additional thirty-nine changes are made. The first public reading of the Declaration of Independence was in Philadelphia on July 8, 1776.

## The Charter of American Liberties

Since its writing, the Declaration of Independence has been regarded as a charter of American liberties, establishing the basic principles that all men are equal in rights, regardless of birth, wealth or status, and that the government is the servant, not the master, of the people.

# Study Questions:

* Were Thomas Jefferson's ideas, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence were considered to be radical for his time?
* How many colonies were represented at the Second Continental Congress?
* How old was Thomas Jefferson when he wrote the Declaration of Independence?