

Jefferson and the end of the American Revolution

Reading Level: Middle School

Thomas Jefferson in Virginia

In September 1776, Thomas Jefferson left Congress. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates as a delegate for Albemarle County from 1776-1779. In 1779, he was elected governor of Virginia. The Revolutionary War had been raging for four years. Much of his time as governor was spent raising troops, arms and supplies for the ongoing war. Virginia farmers also suffered during the war. The British market for tobacco was gone, and wheat was destroyed by drought. However, early in the war, Virginia had not been invaded by the British.

That changed in early 1781 when Benedict Arnold set fire to a foundry near Richmond where guns were stored. Then the British army advanced to Virginia from the south. British General Cornwallis sent soldiers to surprise Thomas Jefferson. He was eager to capture the Virginia Governor and one of the authors of the Declaration of Independence.

Captain Jack Jouett spotted the British soldiers. He realized they were headed to Monticello. Jefferson and several Virginia delegates were staying at the plantation. Riding over forty miles through brush and woods, Jouett arrived at dawn in time to warn Jefferson. Jefferson sent his family to a neighboring farm. He waited at Monticello until he could see Redcoats through his telescope. Then he escaped to too.

Jefferson's second term as governor ended in 1781. Exhausted, he retired to Monticello to his farms, books and family. As he recovered from a fall from a horse, he wrote "Notes on the State of Virginia".



A Jefferson family story relates that Jefferson used this telescope to see British soldiers swarming in the streets of Charlottesville in 1781.



Peace!

In 1781 the British surrendered at Yorktown, Virginia. Afterward, there were minor battles. The Continental army wasn't sent home until 1783.

Surrender of Lord Cornwallis by John Trumbull. Image courtesy the Architect of the Capitol.

From mid 1782 to September 1783 British and American delegates in Paris negotiated peace terms. The Americans were led by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, John Jay and Henry Laurens. In September 1783 the Treaty of Paris was approved. Great Britain finally recognized American independence.

Thomas Jefferson never fought as a soldier in the American Revolution. But his writing skills and his beliefs in the rights of mankind helped shape our country's fight for independence. In June 1783, Jefferson was chosen to be a delegate at the "Confederation" Congress. Now Jefferson would use his writing skills to help shape the new American government.



Th. Jefferson
MONTICELLO