|  |
| --- |
| **First Continental Congress Meets 1774**  The first Continental Congress met in Philadelphia, from September 5th to October 26th 1774. The Congress's major accomplishment was agreeing to a new non-importation agreement.  A cry went on among the colonies after the implementation of the intolerable Acts by the British, in response to the Boston Tea Party. Once again colonists called to organize a meeting or Congress of all the colonies.  Leaders of the various colonies all agreed that such a meeting was welcome and necessary to coordinate their response to the British actions. The various colonies selected their delegations. The representatives all set out for Philadelphia, the agreed location.  On September 5, 1774 the entire delegation met. All of the colonies, with the exception of Georgia, had sent representatives. The Congress was divided between militant and conservative delegates. The conservative delegates wanted to buy time to allow the British government to come to its senses. The more militant delegates wanted to take immediate action against the British.  The Congress debated various options. In the end, the Congress settled on passing a call for non-Importation and non-Exportation, unless the British repealed the actions they had taken against Massachusetts. The delegates called for the immediate non-importation of goods from England, while putting off the non exportation clause for one year. The Congress also agreed to meet again in one year if Britain had not changed its policies.  The accomplishments of the First Continental Congress were modest. None of the delegates were under the illusion that the implementation of the non-importation agreement would change British policies, even if it were possible. Rather, it was the very meeting of the Congress that was important. Delegates from 12 different colonies had assembled. Despite their regional differences the colonist successfully reached an agreement. During one of the early discussions Patrick Henry of Virginia gave a rousing speech in which he stated: "today I am no longer a Virginian, but an American." While state allegiances had not disappeared, the First Continental Congress was an essential milestone in establishing a collective identity for colonists as Americans. The First Continental Congress led, of course, directly to the Second Continental Congress, where momentous events would transpire  **Differing views emerge at the First Continental Congress**  **1. Galloway's Plan for the Union of Great Britain and the Colonies**  Offered by Joseph Galloway of Pennsylvania; this was the first order of business for the First Continental Congress. New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey were especially concerned that the Colonies should reconcile with Great Britain. This was their plan for compromise. The plan was considered very attractive to most of the members, as it proposed a popularly elected Grand Council which would represent the interests of the colonies as a whole, and would be a continental equivalent to the English Parliament. After a sincere debate, it was rejected by a six to five vote on October 22, 1774. It may have been the arrival of the Suffolk County (Boston) resolutions that killed it.  **2. Suffolk Resolves**  Of the numerous meetings held in Massachusetts during 1774 to protest the recent Coercive Acts, the best known was that of delegates from Boston and other towns in surrounding Suffolk County. Joseph Warren captured the mood of his fellow delegates in a series of resolutions that became known as the Suffolk Resolves. They included the following: |

* proclaimed the Coercive Acts to be unconstitutional and void; officials charged with the enforcement of these illegal acts were called upon to resign
* urged Massachusetts to establish a separate free state until the Coercive Acts were repealed
* suggested that future tax collections be retained by the new Massachusetts government and not passed along to British officials
* called for the creation and enforcement of a boycott of British goods and trade with Britain
* advised the people of Massachusetts to appoint militia officers and commence arming their local forces
* warned General Thomas Gage that efforts to arrest citizens on political charges would result in the detention of the arresting officers
* announced that subjects no longer owe loyalty to a king who violates their rights.

These resolutions were passed by a unanimous vote of the Suffolk County towns on September 9. Paul Revere carried a copy of the Suffolk Resolves to the Continental Congress , which was then in session in Philadelphia. Discussion of the Massachusetts actions split the Congress; some felt the statements were too radical and were an invitation to war. Nonetheless, the Resolves were endorsed by a vote of the Congress on September 17.

Massachusetts had unmistakably emerged as the leader of the resistance against British policies. In particular, its decisions to establish a separate government, to collect and retain taxes, and to raise and arm military forces were clearly revolutionary steps and exceeded the actions taken previously by the other colonies.

**Other achievements of the Congress:**

**1. The Association**

The Congress next adopted the Continental Association, or simply, the Association, which established a total boycott by means of non-importation, non-exportation and non-consumption accords.

These agreements were to be enforced by a group of committees in each community, which would publish the names of merchants defying the boycott, confiscate contraband, and encourage public frugality.

**2. Declaration of Rights and Grievances**

The Congress composed a statement of American complaints. It was addressed to King George III, to whom the delegates remained loyal, and pointedly, not to Parliament. In it, the delegates asserted that the colonists had certain rights which included, "life, liberty, and property, and they have never ceded to any sovereign power whatever a right to dispose of either without their consent."

The radical elements were critical of the Declaration because it conceded the right of Parliament to regulate colonial trade, a traditional view long held by most Americans, but one that was losing favor in the mid-1770s.

**3. Future Meeting**

Finally, the Congress agreed to convene the following spring if colonial complaints had not been properly addressed. That meeting, the Second Continental Congress, was indeed called in May 1775 in the wake of the Battle of Lexington and Concord.