GEN REF. 1310 G ROSS

COUNTDOWN TO 1976— "T" MINUS 0 MONTHS

George Ross is the last of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence to be honored in the monthly medal series sponsored by the Bicentennial Council of the Thirteen Original States and produced by the Franklin Mint.

Ross (1730-1779), in addition to being a signer of the Declaration, was an uncle by marriage of the famous



GEORGE ROSS

Betsy Ross.

He was born in Delaware, the son of an Anglican minister who was able to give his son a good tutorial education in the classics. When he was about 18, Ross went to Philadelphia to study law. Eventually he moved to Lancaster, then a frontier town, and built a highly successful practice.

Ross developed a reputation, not only as an excellent lawyer, but also as a most congenial person. He had, too, a reputation as one who enjoyed the "good life," perhaps somewhat too much. He was passionately fond of good food and wine, which is thought to have contributed to his chronic gout and early death.

He was a Pennsylvania delegate to the First Continental Congress in 1774, but was not elected to the Second Congress until after independence had been declared. Then he was appointed as one of the replacements for those Pennsylvania delegates who had not voted for independence, and was able to sign it on August 2.

When the Pennsylvania Convention met to draft the constitution for the new state, Benjamin Franklin was elected president of the convention and George Ross vice president.

Ross was again elected to the Congress even while continuing in the Pennsylvania assembly. However, his chronic illness rapidly grew worse and he had to resign. He was never sufficiently recovered.

200 Years Ago This Month

by DR. J. DUANE SQUIRES

JUNE, 1776: A SIGNIFICANT MONTH MILITARILY AND POLITICALLY

From a military viewpoint, in June, 1776, the Americans witnessed both defeat and victory, together with the threat of deep troubles ahead. All through June the disastrous American retreat from Canada continued, with the beaten Patriot army taking refuge at the southern end of Lake Champlain. Gone was any possibility of conquering Canada; now there was only the hope that the British advance down Lake Champlain could be stopped.

In the southern portion of the infant nation, however, during June just the opposite experience occurred. A powerful British expedition headed by General Sir Henry Clinton and by Admiral Peter Parker prepared to assault Charleston, South Carolina. The Americans were well aware of what was impending, and all through the early months of the year were readying the defenses of that important place. Cognizant of the string of low, sandy islands that fringe Charleston harbor, Colonel William Moultrie began the construction of a fort on Sullivan's Island. It would guard the main entrance to the town.

On the morning of June 28, the British fleet under Admiral Parker undertook the destruction of this fort. Surprisingly it was able to take all the pounding that the Royal Navy could give it, and deal out some shattering bombardment of its own. The British army under Clinton, encamped on another island three miles away, took little or no part in the encounter. After severe losses, including one of their battleships, on the morning after their defeat the British withdrew and sailed back to New York. It was a calamitous setback for the British. The southern states were to be free from organized warfare for the next three years.

Meantime the British forces under the Howe brothers, General Sir William and Admiral Sir Richard, were gathering in New York harbor for a mighty attack on this key point on the American seaboard. On June 25 General Howe with three ships dropped anchor off Staten Island. Five days later he was reinforced by 130 additional ships; a fortnight after that Admiral Howe sailed in with 150 more ships. This armada was the largest expeditionary force which Great Britain had ever sent abroad for a single campaign, and included more than 30,000 men and their equipment. The problems of General Washington and his troops on Manhattan Island were obviously to be great in the weeks ahead.

Politically, June, 1776 saw the movement for complete American independence achieve unstoppable momentum. Ever since the publication of *Common Sense* in January, this movement had been accelerating. In that month New Hampshire had put into effect the first independent state constitution. In April the "Halifax Resolves" in North Carolina had authorized that state's delegates in Congress to work for independence. In May Virginia did likewise. In May, also, Rhode Island issued a declaration of independence.

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered the historic resolution in Congress ". . . these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be. free and independent States." John Adams of Massachusetts seconded the motion. On the 11th of the month Congress selected Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, John Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, and Robert R. Livingston of New York to draw up a proper declaration. By general consent the task of drafting this document was assigned to Jefferson. For the rest of the month, with occasional counsel from his colleagues, the 33-year-old Virginian labored at his task. The result would make history.

vol. VI NO. 6 1976

USA-200—the American Bicentennial Monthly has been designated as official publication by the Bicentennial Council of the Thirteen Original States. The Council is the non-profit corporation established by and representing the official State Bicentennial Commissions of the Thirteen Original States. Editorial opinions expressed in *USA-200* do not necessarily represent the views of the Council nor any of its delegates or member states.

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Address all matters pertaining to the Council and its activities to:

Suite 300, Jefferson Building
901 N. Washington Street
Alexandria, Va. 22314 Tel: (703) 683-2234

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