From Philadelphia, on July 3, 1776, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail about the approval of a resolution of independence the previous day. The following is an excerpt from that letter:

“The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding generations, as the great Anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more. You will think me transported with Enthusiasm but I am not. -- I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. -- Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory. I can see that the End is more than worth all the Means.”

Today, we celebrate our Independence on the 4th of July— the day that the Continental Congress publicly announced the Declaration of Independence, not on the 2nd, when it was approved.
Frederick Douglass: 1852 Fourth of July Speech

“...Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them...”

Douglass’ speech was an exposition of how far the country had come in its relatively short life, and how far it had to go to be a truly ‘free’ county.

“... allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. ... I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope.”

Three of Five Founding Father Presidents died on July 4th (and one modern President was born)

John Adams, 2nd President, and Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President, both died on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, which they had signed.

Five years later, James Monroe, 5th President, passed away in New York City. Newspapers remarked that it was an interesting coincidence to have three former presidents die on the same day.

The 30th President, Calvin Coolidge, was born on July 4, 1872, the only president (so far) to be born on Independence Day.

Millard Fillmore and his Union Continentals

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, former President Millard Fillmore (1800-1874) was supportive of the Union and helped his hometown of Buffalo, New York to organize enlistments and financing drives to support the soldiers.

Fillmore also became the new Captain of the Buffalo City Guards, when the young men in the first guard enlisted. Fillmore’s guard was comprised of retired military officers who called themselves the “Union Continentals.” They performed drills in the city and trained to defend Buffalo from a Confederate attack. In 1865, the Union Continentals also guarded Lincoln’s funeral train while it went through Buffalo.

Millard Fillmore supported the Union, but many people were angry with his positions in regard to President Johnson’s Reconstruction policies, and the Compromise of 1850 (which included the Fugitive Slave Act).

The Story of “Little Trot” Garfield

Eliza Arabella Garfield, born July 3, 1860, was James and Lucretia Garfield’s first child. Named after her grandmothers, little Eliza was nicknamed “Little Trot” after Betsey Trotwood, a character in Charles Dickens’ David Copperfield.

Eliza’s father, James A. Garfield, had been elected to the Ohio state senate a year before she was born, and enlisted in the Union Army a month after her first birthday. While her father was away she lived with her mother in Hiram, Ohio.

Her father would always make sure to add little notes to her in his letters to her mother. He made sure to keep up with everything in her life, while he was away.

One letter, written to her mother from Winchester, Tennessee, dated August 1, 1863 included:

“Dear little Trot, how much I long to see the little cog[ger]! Kiss her for me and tell her the ‘webbels haven’t hurt papa yet.’ ”

Sadly, little Eliza fell ill with diphtheria and passed away in the evening of December 1, 1863, her father and mother by her side. She was buried in Hiram, Ohio, with her gravestone reading “Our Little Girl.”

For more information about James A. Garfield NHS: www.nps.gov/jaga

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