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AMERICA 250

**19 RARE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE PRINTINGS TO GO ON VIEW
NEXT TO INDEPENDENCE HALL FOR 2026**

Benjamin Franklin's American Philosophical Society to Unveil What is Likely the Largest Public Display of Early Declarations, Including a July 4, 1776 Printing, One Handwritten by Jefferson, and the Chair Where He Drafted It

PRESS PHOTOS

[Artifact Photos](#); Credit lines enclosed

PHILADELPHIA (March 12, 2026) – A major America 250 exhibition next door to Independence Hall will bring together 19 rare versions of the Declaration of Independence – including one handwritten by Thomas Jefferson.

This is likely the largest public display of first and early Declaration printings ever mounted in a single location.

Opening April 10, 2026, the American Philosophical Society's [These Truths: The Declarations of Independence](#) tells the story of America's founding through early Declaration printings (1776-1826) and dozens more treasured artifacts, including the chair that Thomas Jefferson sat in while writing it, a massive map that hung in Independence Hall during the Declaration process, and a 1776 printing of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine.

These Truths shows that the Declaration was a process, not just an event on July 4th, and its story is more complex than assumed. This semiquincentennial exhibition explores the document's roles in its first 50 years – as a pronouncement of news, a political tool, and a national symbol – and considers how it continues to evolve and shape the nation.

"As millions descend on Independence Mall for America's 250th, we're bringing some of our greatest treasures out of our vault," **said Dr. Patrick Spero, CEO, APS.** "The APS was founded by Ben Franklin and led for two decades by Thomas Jefferson. It was one of the intellectual bedrocks of the nation's founding, and our collection contains some of the most important copies of the Declaration ever printed. This exhibition shows how these artifacts – brown with age, sometimes tattered and hard to read – mattered, evolved, and still shape the nation."

Exhibition Highlights

- Declaration of Independence printings:
 - A handwritten copy of the Declaration sent to Virginia by Thomas Jefferson on July 8, 1776, covered front and back in Jefferson's neat, miniscule handwriting

- Though an enslaver, Jefferson called slavery a violation of “life and liberty” in this version – language Congress removed from the final text
 - July 4, 1776 printing by John Dunlap. In the rush to spread the news, the sheet was folded while the ink was still wet
 - The only copy of a July 1776 Dunlap printing on parchment, used for documents worthy of preservation
 - Benjamin Owen Tyler’s 1818 printing that transformed the Declaration from a political document into a sacred national text
 - John Binns’ 1819 visually striking, commemorative printing with seals of the 13 states
 - Willam J. Stone’s first complete facsimile of the parchment Declaration, commissioned by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams.
- The chair Thomas Jefferson sat in when he drafted the Declaration at 7th and Market
- A tattered and stained first edition of *Common Sense* (1776) by Thomas Paine, the viral pamphlet that energized the rebellion (printed two blocks from the APS)
- An 8-by-8-foot map of North America, purchased by Benjamin Franklin and the largest of its time, which hung in the State House (Independence Hall) when the delegates debated and approved the Declaration. It recently underwent monthslong restoration and this is only third time it’s been displayed for the public
- Miniature mid-1700s Sketch of the State House that has been enlarged to roughly 7.5 ft. wide by 5.25 ft. tall
- A recreation of the platform from which Colonel John Nixon likely first read the Declaration aloud on July 8, 1776 – will serve as a forum for public readings and programming
- *Re-Declaration of Independence*, a newly commissioned project by artist Johanna Drucker, that imagines how its enduring principles might conjure a brighter future

“Whether a priceless artifact penned by Jefferson’s own quill or a twelve-cent wall hanging, the many versions of the Declaration *are* its history,” said **Dr. David Gary, Exhibition Curator and Associate Director of Collections, APS**. “*These Truths* brings those original documents together to trace the arc from the creation of the revolutionary text to its transformation into a foundational symbol of the nation through a wide cast of characters from well-known Founders to Irish-immigrant printers.”

Why APS?

The APS was founded in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin and other like-minded Enlightenment figures in the colonies. Four of the five members of the Declaration’s drafting committee were members of the APS, including John Adams, Franklin and Jefferson (who was the APS’s president from 1797-1814), and 15 APS Members were among the Declaration’s signers. When John Nixon read the Declaration publicly for the first time on July 8, 1776, scholars say he did so from a platform that was originally erected by APS to observe the transit of the planet Venus in 1769.

The APS Museum, which turns 25 this year, welcomes 150,000-200,000 visitors annually.

Additional Resources

These Truths will come to life through special programming throughout 2026:

- May 16: [APS Neighborhood Fun Day](#) – a day of Declaration-inspired hands-on activities in the APS's Jefferson Garden
- May 28: [30/30 Dueling Declarations](#) – both the APS and the Museum of the American Revolution have Declaration exhibitions this year; enjoy some friendly competition to see which old city institution can more efficiently share Declaration highlights
- June 4-6: [America's 1776: Independence and its Enduring Legacies](#) – hear from leading historians and scholars on how this central moment in American history has shaped our national self-perception for 250 years
- June 13, July 11, August 8, September 19: [Revolutionary Saturdays](#) – summer Saturday events with hands-on, family-friendly activities

These Truths will be open from April 10, 2026 to January 3, 2027 at the American Philosophical Society Museum at 104 S. 5th Street, Philadelphia. Admission is free and the museum will be open Thursday-Sunday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (and Wednesdays from Memorial Day to Labor Day).

The exhibition and catalog for *These Truths: The Declarations of Independence* has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

Additional operational funding has been provided by a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's Cultural and Historical Support Program, a program funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

We are also grateful for support from APS Members and Friends, and donations by visitors to the APS Museum.

[Learn more.](#)

ABOUT THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The American Philosophical Society, the oldest learned society in the United States, was founded in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin for the purpose of “promoting useful knowledge.” The APS sustains this mission today by engaging leading scholars, scientists, and professionals through elected membership and fellowship, supporting research and discovery, and through its research library. The APS continues to reflect the founders’ spirit of inquiry, provide a forum for the free exchange of ideas, and convey the conviction that intellectual inquiry and critical thought are inherently in the best interest of the public. In 2001, the APS opened its Museum gallery in Philosophical Hall, the Society’s home since 1789. The Museum changes annually to highlight objects from its collection.

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