

# VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

If independence means freedom, and I think it does to most people, and if we're about to celebrate Independence to commemorate the declaration of this nation's independence from British rule, the occasion is worthy of consideration and attention.

We need to remember the occurrence we celebrate isn't freedom itself, but rather the celebration of it. We don't celebrate the American Revolutionary War nor the fact of winning a war against our mother-country. It's an important distinction.

Although affixing signatures on the Declaration of Independence took place more than a year after open hostilities against English rule erupted at the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the declaration was a culmination of years of attempts on the part of the colonists to reach amicable resolutions of disagreements.

As we begin this our 250th year as an independent nation with appropriate parades, music, fireworks displays, perhaps we as a population are yearning for an independence different from that fought for so long ago. Perhaps some of us wish for independence from responsibility for our fellow-inhabitants of this planet.

That particular freedom becomes increasingly difficult to achieve and the wish for it was unforeseen by those who drafted our declaration. It was not their intention to withdraw from intercourse with the world and its peoples- far from it- only to cast away the cloak of British tyranny did the American colonies revolt. And we celebrate that decision.

We could wish to be free from want; yet, taken as a whole no population in the world today enjoys greater freedom from want than Americans (but there are still among us those who are in want). We could wish to be free from fear; while no country has better reason to feel secure, many well-informed and thinking Americans live in constant fear.

We fear the threatening war-clouds that boil on every horizon; we fear inflation and unemployment; we fear restrictions imposed by energy shortages; we fear one another and violence both within and beyond our national borders.

Our desires to be free and independent of problems such as the hostage crisis, the Cuban immigration, Russia's invasion of Afghanistan and its implications, are frustrated by our very proximity to foreign countries. All too often we see ourselves deserving to live our lives without such interferences and without global responsibilities.

## The Helping Hand

Most of us who enjoy writing are charter members of the Procrastinators Club. Therefore, anytime that one of us succeeds in meeting a deadline, it is an event justifying a good bottle of ale, if not a magnum of champagne.

Thus, I thought I would express my thanks to a fellow writer, Andrea Leonard. Andrea spent more time than she could afford sharing her memories of Osterville with me so that I could put together an article for the Patriot's anniversary edition. Much of my information and several of my leads came from my chat with her, and I am truly grateful.

Ed O'Toole  
Mashpee

Is that a state our founding fathers who affixed their names to the Declaration of Independence were attempting to secure for us? Not likely. They knew the prices to be paid for our freedom from Britain would be high, that bullets would fly, that men would die, women and children suffer, financial resources would be eroded and strained almost beyond endurance. Nor could they be sure our effort to achieve freedom from Britain would succeed.

The colonists were divided; many were appalled at the very idea of rejecting British sovereignty and renouncing loyalty to their King. The Loyalists or Tories were sharply divided from the Patriots or Whigs whose zeal eventually overwhelmed the cooler heads who viewed rebellion as treason.

Signers of the Declaration knew all this. They knew the years ahead would bring hardship, all but destroy the fragile web of social fabric that had been over 150 years in the weaving. They took that chance and in so doing put in jeopardy the safety and security of every English colonist living this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Events of the months and years that followed made them heroes and gave us the 4th of July holiday to celebrate. Too often it's overlooked that the document set forth as man's unalienable rights "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." There was no mention of rights to safety and security nor was happiness deemed a right. Its pursuit, yes; its achievement, no.

Between the 19th of April, 1775, and the signing in Paris of the Treaty of Peace recognizing the independence of the United States of America on September 3, 1783, the rights of many English and colonists were assuredly abridged for freedom's cause.

Just as Americans were not promised by the signers of the Declaration freedom from problems, want, fear, wars, economic upheavals, violences domestic or foreign, or freedom to waste, we were not promised freedom from responsibility for those who live beyond our borders.

We cannot and should not attempt to police the world; nevertheless, it has been, it is, and it will continue to be our responsibility to conduct ourselves and our affairs with the same degree of thoughtfulness for peoples of other nations and to accord to them the same respect and rights which we demand for ourselves.

When we fail in this we must suffer the consequences although they are distasteful to us.

The preliminaries to the American Revolution were not shortlived nor was the step to open rebellion taken impulsively. Rumblings against the Crown were heard among the colonists as early as the 1750's; within the body of the Declaration of Independence are enumerated no less than twenty-seven grievances against George III of Great Britain.

Interestingly enough, one reads, "He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws of Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither..."

Although times and circumstances have changed in the intervening two centuries, we may well consider that the Second Continental Congress which convened May 10, 1775, spent more than a year deliberating the wisdoms and follies of publishing a Declaration "that these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved..."

Nearly a month was spent in drafting the document; finally, of course, on July 4, 1776, the Representatives to the Second Continental Congress adopted the statement without dissent.

The Revolution itself was challenged again twenty years after the Treaty of Peace when our nation's integrity was assailed a second time by Britain in the War of 1812; that conflict concluded in 1814 when America again prevailed.

Independence, then, is not only hard-won, its declaration holds no guarantee of fact nor of perpetuity. Celebrate as we may, it is well to remember our historic past to better evaluate our chaotic present and well to assess the values upon which our nation's creeds and beliefs are founded.

As modern communication and transportation shrink the world, as the nation's businesses fling over the globe's surface a network of influence and commerce, our government is frequently influenced to support private interests at the expense of foreign populations.

Were our nation's leaders to adhere to the precepts outlined in our own Declaration of Independence, our standing among nations would be one of which we could all be justly proud.

It is too often forgotten that the most eloquent statement of the American creed, our Declaration of Independence, includes in its opening paragraphs, "... all men are created equal... are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

That statement applies to everyone; not solely to those of us fortunate enough to be Americans.