



JAMES C. THOMPSON II

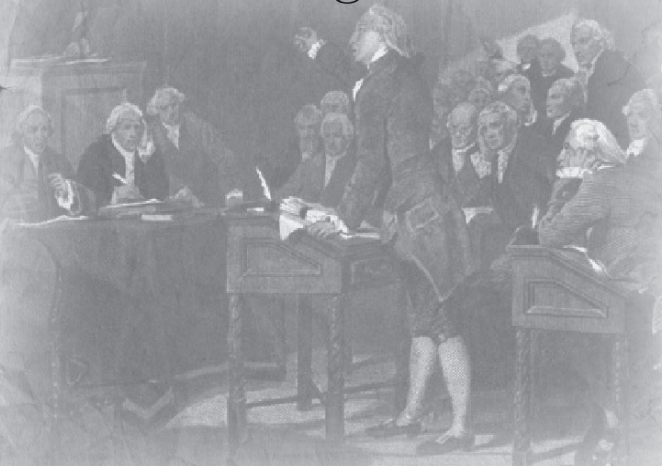
THE  
Dubious  
Achievement  
OF THE  
First Continental  
Congress



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the First Continental  
Congress



*James C. Thompson II*

A "POCKET BOOK" HISTORY FROM  
COMMONWEALTH BOOKS

*Alexandria, Virginia*

Volume 3

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# Acknowledgments

**T**HIS BOOK has been created with the invaluable help of several individuals whom I would like to recognize here.

Producing a book is a taxing enterprise. I could not have done it without the patient assistance of John Reinhardt and Kathy Stratton. John designed and processed my many manuscript revisions into the book's final form. He is a true craftsman and a pleasure to work with. I appreciate his professional skill, his enthusiasm and all of his encouragements. Similar thanks go to Kathy Stratton who reread the final manuscript and prepared the index.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to Lydia Coleman who is my silent partner in this enterprise. Lydia listened as I transcribed every word in each corrected manuscript. She provided invaluable comments and suggestions on how to improve the clarity of the text, then proofed and corrected each succeeding transcript.

What is now *The Dubious Achievement of the 1<sup>st</sup> Continental Congress* began two decades ago as background information for a book on Thomas Jefferson's early political rebellions. I did the initial research in the early 1990's while living in Alexandria, Virginia. It was then that I created the chronology of events which forms the backbone of the book and sorted out the processes in which John Adams and Charles Thomson produced and then published what is today known as the *Declaration of Rights and Grievances*. I would like extend my thanks to my family and many friends in Alexandria

## Acknowledgments

for the help they extended to me in what probably seemed at that time to be a wild goose chase.

Some of the information in the finished manuscript I acquired during my tenure as a Batten Fellow at the International Center of Jefferson Studies at Monticello. I would like to thank the librarians at the beautiful Thomas Jefferson Library for their assistance in this regard.

The finished work also owes a good deal to the internet which I now know is a phenomenal source of facts and general information on every subject imaginable. I used it to clarify events and confirm facts on virtually everything from William Pitt's *curriculum vita* to the appointments and dates of the various committees of the first Philadelphia Congress. While the *Encyclopedia Britannica* has been my companion since I began work on this book two decades ago, over the past two years I have come to appreciate the amazing usefulness of Wikipedia and other similar online references sources.

I would also like to acknowledge the Yale Law School's Avalon Project (at <http://avalon.law.yale.edu>), Google Books (at <http://books.google.com/books>) and the Wikisource Free Library (at <http://wikisource.org>) for providing access to historical documents that I might otherwise have been unable to access.

In closing, I would like to address a matter that I have found vexing. All of the illustrations in this book were found on the internet. In most instances they were found with Google searches. Most of them turned up on multiple websites. In only a few instances was there information pertaining to either the artist or the owner. In instances where this information was available, I have included it in the book's Illustration List. In instances where I was unable to find this information, I have noted that the picture is a Web Image. Since these images are effectively advertisements in the public domain and in resolutions that are too low to qualify as being of "commercial quality", I have made no effort to acquire rights to their use.



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## Introduction

**T**he *Dubious Achievement of the 1st Continental Congress* is the biography of a document.

What is known today as the “Declaration of Rights and Grievances” was created by John Adams as he corrected the record of the Congress between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 1774. Adams constructed this document from committee reports that had been prepared and submitted to the Congress separately. Having assembled this new “declaration”, Adams passed it with the rest of his revisions to his friend and political ally, Charles Thomson. Secretary of the Congress Thomson then incorporated it into the congressional record. This was done after the Congress adjourned - and after its members had departed from Philadelphia. The *dubious* achievement of the 1st Continental Congress is the official recognition of a document that the Congress neither approved nor even considered.

The Congress did consider (and approve) a report on the grievances of the colonies prepared and submitted by the sub-committee it had appointed to do this. This sub-committee was chaired by General John Sullivan. At the time the Congress established this first sub-committee, it also created a second sub-committee, this one to draft a report on the rights of the colonies. John Adams was appointed chairman of this panel. Adams proceeded to draft its report himself. The members of Adams’s sub-committee approved his

“bill of rights”, but it met with insurmountable opposition in the “great committee” which had commissioned the report.

Adams twice re-drafted the report, but the Great Committee was dissolved before voting on Adams’s final revision. Because the report was never released by this committee, the general Congress never considered it.

*The Dubious Achievement of the 1st Continental Congress* explains why Samuel Adams and his cousin John—leaders of the patriotic faction—considered a “bill of rights” essential to their cause, why the conservative faction objected to it, how these “Tories” prevented the Congress from concluding on the matter, how John Adams and Charles Thomson manipulated their unsuspecting colleague (John Dickinson) to get Adams’s phantom declaration into the record of the Congress and how by doing so they prepared the way for their forthcoming demand for political independence.

The story is told in these four richly-illustrated parts:

## **Part I: Agents of Empire and Rebellion, 1754–1767**

The story’s introductory segment recounts how the imperialist policies of William Pitt set England on its road to empire, how the burdensome financial obligations that attended its acquisition of France’s North American territories created political problems in England and how the leaders of the English Parliament transported this turmoil to Britain’s American colonies with their unprecedented new revenue policies. The men who superintended England’s emerging empire and the American “patriots” who organized and managed the forthcoming rebellion against it are introduced in this segment. It concludes by remembering that the colonials forced Parliament to rescind the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act and that Parliament therefore redoubled its efforts to collect the duties prescribed in the Townshend Act of 1767.

## **Part II: The Patriotic Movement, 1767–1774**

The story's second segment recounts the steady deterioration in relations between Britain's tax collectors and their military guards and the people of Boston. It observes how a cell of patriotic activists began to organize resistance to Parliament's revenue policy and that the focus of this resistance gradually shifted from Parliament's objectionable policies to Britain's "over-subordinate" government. It traces the sequence of events that produced the "Boston Massacre", the "Gaspee Affair" and the "Boston Tea Party". It recounts that Lord North closed the Port of Boston in response to this last insulting act of vandalism and it observes that Boston's patriots responded to this punitive measure by transforming their "patriotic" movement into an "independence" movement. This segment concludes by remembering that Samuel Adams, leader of Boston's patriots, undertook to unite the colonies in common cause after the closing of the Port of Boston and that conservatives in Massachusetts's sister colonies, hoping to avoid the untoward consequences of such a move, proposed a "congress of the colonies" to consider the matter.

## **Part III: Congressional Politics, 5 September 1774–26 October 1774**

The story's third segment observes that while the call for the "congress of the colonies" did not originate with Massachusetts's patriotic leaders, they recognized it as an opportunity and joined it with a two-part plan to advance their new political agenda. It remembers that the first part of this plan, to be superintended by Sam Adams, was to rally support for the "solemn league and covenant" that Adams had called for in June. The second part of this plan, to be superintended by his cousin John, was to win approval for a bill