

NEW HAMPSHIRE WAS AND IS **FIRST!**

We are all proud of living in this great state of New Hampshire. However, we have many things to be proud of, for which you may not be aware.

New Hampshire was the **FIRST** colony to set the unique leadership position during the colonial period. On June 19, 1754, the custom was adopted at the "Colonial Congress" at Albany, New York that the colonies would vote on "American Issues", in order from North to South, giving New Hampshire the **FIRST** vote among all the colonies. New Hampshire representatives to this Congress were Theodor Atkinson, Henry Serburne and Richard Sibird of Portsmouth and Meshech Weare of Hampton Falls. This Congress proposed to merge the American colonies, with authority to impose taxes, create armies and establish forts for protection against the French encroachments, elect members to a governing council with the King appointing a President-General with veto powers. This was not accepted by the Congress.

On January 5, 2015, we celebrated the 239th anniversary of the signing of NH's first Constitution. This was the **FIRST** free constitutional government in the world. It was signed on January 5, 1774, before our colony entered into any active conflict with the British forces. It set up our system of government, following the example set out by the Iroquois Indian Confederation and is still followed by our American government in our National constitution. It set a system of two houses of government to address internal as well as external issues, and is still in effect, addressing how to deal with other colonies as we struggled to find what we had in common as well as our differences.

The first Continental Congress met in September, 1774 at Philadelphia, where General John Sullivan of Durham and Colonel Nathaniel Folsom of Exeter represented New Hampshire.

On December 14 and 15, 1774, we were the **FIRST** colony in armed conflict against the British military forces at Fort William and Mary, now Fort Constitution on the island of New Castle, protecting Portsmouth Harbor and Kittery, Maine. The colonists took over the fort claiming the ammunition and cannons for use in the anticipated conflict.

We were the **FIRST** colony to sign the Declaration of Independence at Philadelphia, since signers were in the previously determined order. The **FIRST** was Dr. Josiah Bartlett of Kingston, the **SECOND** Captain William Whipple of Portsmouth. The **THIRD** signer was Dr. Matthew Thornton, but he didn't actually sign it until November 19th, since he was not one of the original members of the Council until September, after the Declaration was official. His name was put in its official position when the document was reprinted with John Hancock's prominent signature. Once the Declaration was approved on July 4, 1776, it was printed and sent to the various now "states" to be read in public. On July 18th, it was read in Exeter by John Taylor Gilman, later to be Governor of the State of New Hampshire for 14 years. Dr. Matthew Thornton, then living in Londonderry (Derry Village) soon moved to Merrimack taking over the property (and ferry) owned by the Tory, Edward Goldstone Lutwyche, whose property was confiscated during the war.

New Hampshire had the most men at the Battles of Bunker Hill and at Bennington. We were also the key ninth state to ratify the US Constitution on June 21, 1788, making it official.

All these historical events are commemorated on the Bicentennial NH State Liquor bottle collection owned by Bob L'Heureux, who loaned them for display by the Merrimack Historical Society. Did you know that Merrimack had the **FIRST** European resident on the Merrimack River in what is now New Hampshire? John Cromwell built a trading post on the river in 1655 on land now owned by the Anheuser Busch Brewery. He traded with the Penacook Indians during the Reign of Chief Passaconaway, who led the Penacook Indians in the Merrimack River Valley from Lake Winnepesaukee to the Atlantic Ocean. Passaconaway was granted land on both sides of the river, including two islands.

You are invited to join your local Historical Society to learn more about what makes New Hampshire unique. The Merrimack Historical Society has its headquarters in a one-room schoolhouse in South Merrimack. The Society Museum is open, at no cost, on Tuesdays from noon to 8 PM and by appointment at 520 Boston Post Road in South Merrimack. Contact Anita at 424-5084 or anitacreager58@comcast.net for more information.