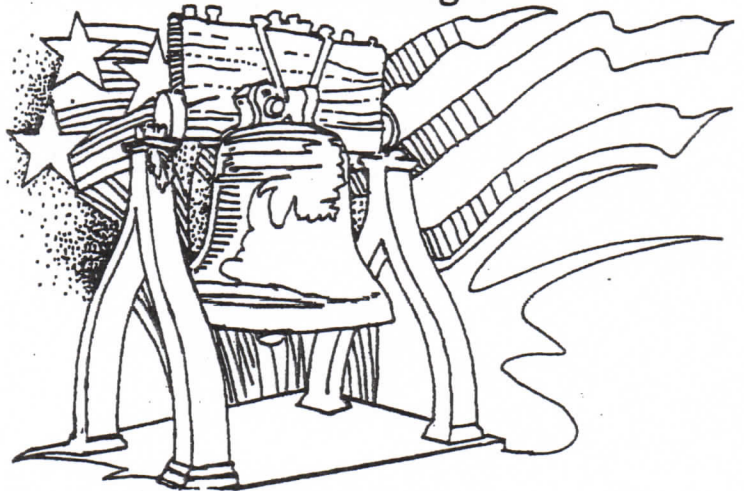


A Return to Philadelphia: The Constitutional Congress

By 1785, the American states were in trouble. Dealing with quarrels between the states, worthless paper money, and a government with limited powers, both the states and the Confederation Congress realized that the nation had serious problems.

It was obvious to many that the Articles of Confederation could not bind the thirteen states into one cohesive nation. But change came slowly. At his home, Mt. Vernon, George Washington called a meeting between representatives of Virginia and Maryland to discuss navigation rights on the Potomac River. After the success of this meeting, the Virginia legislature invited all the states to meet in 1786 in Annapolis, Maryland, to discuss trade. Five states sent representatives. A decision was made to meet again, and in 1787, a new convention began in Philadelphia in the hall in which the Declaration of Independence had been signed. The meeting's goal was to revise the Articles of Confederation and strengthen them. Fifty-five delegates representing twelve states (excluding Rhode Island) met. A distinguished and experienced group gathered. It included George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, others who had



signed the Declaration of Independence or the Articles of Confederation, or had served in the Congress of the Confederation, and still others who had done several of these things. Together, these men changed their goal from revising the Articles to remaking the structure of the government of America.

First of all, important decisions were made concerning the nature of the meeting. The delegates unanimously selected Washington as convention leader, and agreed that all debates were to be kept secret.

Review and Write

1. What do you think was the most important problem the United States faced by the mid 1780s? Explain your answer. _____

2. What series of events led to the 1787 meeting in Philadelphia? _____

3. Describe the group which met in 1787. _____

4. What was the purpose of the Philadelphia convention? _____

5. Had you been present at the Philadelphia convention expecting to change the Articles of Confederation, what would be the most important change you would have wanted to make? Why? _____

