

Congress declined the offer, but it did agree to assemble here for a session which lasted from November 26, 1783 until August 13, 1784. So, for nearly nine months, Annapolis was the capital of the United States and here in this very building, in the room we now call the Old Senate Chamber, the Continental Congress met. I might add that the room in which the meeting was held was described by one of the congressional delegates as "perhaps one of the prettiest in America." As you can see for yourself, it is indeed a handsome meeting chamber, decorated with carvings by William Buckland, one of America's finest architects. During its session between November 1783 and August 1784, the Continental Congress conducted some very important business within these very walls. On December 23, General Washington came here to present his resignation as Commander-in-Chief to the Congress. On the congressional calendar was the important business of the ratification of the Treaty of Paris. But when that document finally arrived in Annapolis, the Congress could not act immediately because it lacked a quorum. As I have said, communications and transportation in those times were slow processes.

Thomas Jefferson, serving as chairman of the ratification committee, was most anxious to get the treaty ratified before the March 3 deadline. But the lack of a congressional quorum made this impossible. On January 13, two tardy delegates from Connecticut reached Annapolis. On the following day, a missing delegate from South Carolina finally arrived here. Jefferson had his quorum and on that same day, January 14, the Congress assembled and in a brief, simple ceremony, ratified the Treaty of Paris. The great American Revolution was then officially over and by the terms set forth in Article I of the treaty, his Britannic majesty, King George III, acknowledged the independence of the United States. The Congress issued an official proclamation announcing the ratification, facsimiles of which are available here today. Recognition of the United States by other nations of the world soon followed.

That, in brief, is the story of the ratification of the Treaty of Paris. On July 4, 1776, the American colonies had declared themselves independent. However, the Declaration of Independence was a unilateral action. Six years of war and the Treaty of Paris were required to make our freedom an accomplished fact. So, I think it can be said that the official birth of our nation took place in this very building, on January 14, 182 years ago today.

Maryland does not have a Bunker Hill, or a Yorktown. But we do have this shrine of history, the Maryland State House, and the old