

RECENT REVIEWS

The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congresses

“Mark Grossman, author of the *Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress*, is credited with editing and authoring a long list of reputable reference sources. Since 1993, he has authored multiple editions of the *Encyclopedia of the United States Cabinet, Technology Law and U.S. Land and Natural Resource Policy* as well as many first edition titles such as the *Encyclopedia of the Speakers of the House of Representatives*. His extensive knowledge and expertise in the history of the federal government is what ultimately lead to this unique, comprehensive work.

The *Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress* is a product of more than 25 years’ worth of research and over a dozen research trips to the UK. It is the first published comprehensive encyclopedic work covering the first and second Continental Congresses and the first Federal Congress. While this work includes all persons, places, events, legal documents and cases and battles of the American Revolution, it is not a work on the American Revolution. Entries pertaining to the American Revolution are only included because those entries also pertain to the Continental Congress.

The excellent content and structure of this particular source shows the extreme care and attention to detail that was present during the research process. The *Encyclopedia* consists of an alphabetical listing of 509 entries, each of which include some special addition to the entry such as a photo or a state seal. Many of the entries also include excerpts from relevant primary sources and numerous footnotes. The *Encyclopedia* is not limited only to entries about important persons in the Continental Congress; it also includes entries about relevant organizations and governmental bodies, pertinent legislation and documents and geographic locations, places and businesses. In some cases, the author includes alternative spellings for names, which is most likely a result of alternative name spellings in the primary sources.

While the entries themselves are the primary focus of this tome, there are other valuable sections: the historical timeline, primary source documents, appendices, bibliography and index. The historical timeline starts in 1764, with the passing of the Sugar and Currency Acts and ends with the New City meeting of the US Senate and House of Representatives in 1789. In addition to including excerpts from primary sources in many of the entries, the author also includes 31 unedited, fully intact primary sources. Speeches, legislative documents and letters are a few of the primary source types included. One of the reviewer’s favorite aspects of the *Encyclopedia* is the appendices. With six different appendices, the reader can easily identify which delegates were from which states, the occupation(s) of the individual signers of the Declaration of Independence, the geographic location of the individual signers of the Articles of Confederation, the location and times of the Continental Congress sessions and statistical information about the original 13 colonies. With 509 entries and the wealth of information found in the additional sections, it is only expected that the author would have a rather large bibliography – approximately 1,570 books and articles, 103 unpublished

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dissertations, theses and other works, 99 newspapers and magazines, 37 Continental Congress and colonial documents, 82 colonial and state documents, 23 miscellaneous government documents and three manuscript collections. The cross-referenced index is essentially the icing on the cake for this highly useable resource.

This is obviously an excellent, well-researched and written encyclopedia which would be extremely useful for research projects, reference interactions and other academic inquiries; however, it would best serve libraries connected to large research institutions with strengths in history, political science, archaeology and cultural studies. In public libraries, archives and special libraries that are geographically located in what were the original 13, the *Encyclopedia* probably would have a more patron appeal than in libraries located elsewhere, far removed from the physical history of the early American republic. This is a highly recommended source."

-Reference Reviews

"Grossman's unique resource is a comprehensive work canvassing the entirety of the Continental Congress, from its first meeting, in September 1774, to the initial meeting of the first U.S. federal government, in 1789. The 509 individual entries cover the great as well as the lesser-known, from Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine to Maryland delegate Jeremiah Townley Chase and health-care pioneer Dr. James Tilton. Also included are several topical entries, such as "Religion and the Continental Congress" and "Treaty of Alliance with France." The work also includes a historical time line and 31 primary documents, including the Suffolk Resolves (September 9, 1774) and Richard H. Lee's resolution for independence."

-Booklist, February 2016

"The formative period of the US was one of great excitement and intellectual ferment, with intense discussions over how to form a new and effective national government. Grossman, author of *Constitutional Amendments* and many other works, has spent over two decades investigating the processes of government to produce this useful reference tool for historical research. Its more than 500 entries include excerpts from contemporary letters, newspaper articles, and official documents, and are well documented with illustrations and many footnotes at the end. Most entries treat the individuals of the day who influenced the course of events and formulation of the Constitution. This focus shows how important individuals were in driving the construction of a new country and its administrative structure. Also covered are political-philosophical theories, previous foundational documents that form a part of the nation's constitutional history, and the different groups concerned with or affected by the Constitution. The second volume includes a time line of events, texts of important documents, appendixes with supplementary information, and an extensive bibliography and index. An online version of the encyclopedia is also available at a reasonable price. While one may find similar information in a number of other places, it is quite helpful to have the materials located in one resource."

-CHOICE, February 2016

"Authored by Mark Grossman, this specialized reference attempts to provide comprehensive coverage of "the Continental Congresses and the persons, places, and events that had an impact on these formative bodies." In

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an effort to fulfill this goal, the set contains some 509 entries in a straightforward A-Z arrangement with references to numerous primary sources.

As you might expect, the vast majority of the entries are biographies of members of the First and Second Continental Congresses as well as other relevant players who had an impact on the formation and work of those bodies. Additional entries focus on relevant issues, events, places, battles, laws, and treaties. As such there are discussions of topics ranging from the Coercive Acts to the Declaration of Independence; from Loyalists to the Committees of Correspondence and from Espionage Tactics to the Diplomacy employed by the Continental Congresses. Each article is factual and thoroughly researched with liberal use of quotes from primary sources and including cited analysis from a variety of historians. Each entry reinforces this impression with an impressive work cited list that serious researchers will appreciate. Value-added features include an historic timeline, numerous primary documents, an exhaustive bibliography and a general index. There is also a very useful index of the delegates by state contained in the appendix as well as lists of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation by occupation, the Presidents of the Continental Congresses, and the location and dates of the various sessions.

The *Encyclopedia of Continental Congresses* is an obvious labor of love. The time and effort needed to gather and distill information contained in these two volumes required a deep scholarly commitment. Not only does Mr. Grossman cover those who served in these formative Congresses, he also includes those who were selected but did not serve. By quoting numerous primary sources, he offers not only firsthand accounts but is able to provide the perspectives of both Colonial and British observers and participants. And by including the comments of numerous historians, Mr. Grossman intersperses immediate scholarly analysis. The *Encyclopedia of Continental Congresses* is a unique resource that serves both as central repository of detailed biographies and as a rich source of references for the avid researcher. As such, it is a natural addition to academic library collections that support the serious study of this formative time in U.S. history.”

-Against the Grain, November 2015

“*The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress* is a two-volume set, which offers an in-depth look into the first Continental Congress in 1774, the second Continental Congress, 1775-1789, and the first Federal Congress in 1789. It is written by Mark Grossman, author of *Encyclopedia of the United States Cabinet: 1789-2010* and *Speakers of the House of Representatives, 1789-2009*, all published by Grey House Publishing. This 1,746-page, two-volume set does not merely focus on the men who answered the call to serve as delegates to the Continental Congress but on those who did not serve during the days leading up to and during the American Revolution and creation of the U.S. Constitution. Mark Grossman also sheds light on and confronts issues dealing with the Native Americans as a people, the role of women in society, and our nation’s ability to handle diplomacy to name a few. A small but interesting piece of information that exposes the depth and quality of research that went into creating this multivolume set is found in the preface under the heading *The Story Behind the Story*. While some may regard this small segment as trivial information, it opens the reader to the creational framework of the resource that lays before them, which was in fact 25 years in the making.

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Grossman shares how his conceived concept for the *Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress* was born out of the coverage the *Miami Herald* ran in 1987, tied to the 200th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution; the series was called “We the People’: The Constitutional Convention of 1787. He noted that the newspaper only focused on daily happenings at the Constitutional Convention. After collecting and reading all the articles put out by the *Miami Herald*, he concluded there was no one single volume that discussed what other events and persons were influential during this period of America’s history; moreover, there was no real definitive work that covered the Continental Congress as well. Through the course of the preface, the reader is provided with a very short and concise depiction of the events that transpired in 1774. This gives the reader enough insight to understand why the Continental Congresses were called into being. Grossman also explains his in-depth research methods and acknowledges the various institutes where he obtained the material used to see this work come to fruition.

The uniqueness of *The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress* is evident on the very first page of the preface (xvii) where he introduces the reader to quotes from primary resources. “William Eddis, the Surveyor for Annapolis, who had a front row seat for the conflict that was about to reach a tipping point, wrote to a friend in England on 28 May 1774: ‘All America is in a flame! I hear strange language every day. The colonists are ripe for any measure that will tend to the preservation of what they call natural liberty.’” Grossman’s use of direct quotes from firsthand accounts sets the narrative hook if that is even possible for a reference book. The use of and placement of the quote on the very first page of the preface is shouting to the reader/researcher that they are in for a grandiose experience, more so than they may have come to expect based on their use of an ordinary encyclopedia regardless of the subject matter. We live in a digital age where Wikipedia and one’s need for instant gratification in finding a quick but often bland tertiary encyclopedia entry on a particular topic has seemed to lessen the value of the encyclopedia as a true reference tool. Mark Grossman’s *Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress* will help shatter the user’s misconception of just what an encyclopedia can bring to the research process.

This nicely hardbound two-volume set presents through the course of 1,746 pages, 509 detailed entries covering each delegate who served on either the first Continental Congress in 1774, the second Continental Congress from 1775 to 1789, or the first Federal Congress in 1789. Grossman focuses on both the more significant figures [historical household names] and those who may be lesser known or who were overshadowed by their more prominent counterparts. All of them regardless how large or small played a vital role in the Continental Congresses, and Grossman ensures the reader sees their importance. His focus shines light on all the delegates who attended these meetings, stressing the significant figures of the political social scene, as well as women and other figures involved at the time. In addition to these detailed biographies, this reference work includes comprehensive accounts of places, battles, laws, treaties, and court cases that were significant to the workings of the Continental Congresses.

The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress is presented in a very straight-forward manner, regardless of whether the user is a novice first-year college student or ardent researcher. It offers a Table of Contents which lists the 509 entries from Andrew Adams to John Joachim Zubly. Grossman provides the reader not only a descriptive entry pertaining to the delegate’s time as a member of the Continental Congress, but a comprehensive history of the men prior to and after their time served. The reader will not only be impressed

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by the extensive list of delegates presented to him, but will be astonished by the incredible collection of topics, including The Bank of the United States, Relations with France, Lexington and Concord, Nassau Hall, and The Olive Branch Petition. Nearly all entries include either a photo or a state seal, italicized excerpts from relevant primary documents, and footnotes.

Since Grossman clearly understands that events in history just do not happen randomly or haphazardly in some spatial plane, he added a Historical Timeline right after the Table of Contents. This timeline will help the researcher who may not be as in tune with America's history during the years leading up to and during the American Revolution. He begins the timeline in 1764 with the passage of The Sugar Act and The Currency Act, both of which led to protests in the colonies. The timeline ends in 1789, when the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives met in New York City, marking the official end to the Second Continental Congress. The timeline will provide the backstory to the formation of the Continental Congress and first Federal Congress.

There is some validity in the old cliché "When History Comes Alive!" Mark Grossman's use of 31 primary documents transports the reader into this period of American history. The use of the selected primary resources helps provide additional insight into this turbulent period of American history, promoting an understanding of the general and the detailed workings of the Continental Congresses. Here readers will find familiar documents, such as Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech, as well as more obscure texts like a letter from John Adams describing his journey to the First Continental Congress. One of the more interesting documents comes from *The Massachusetts Spy* newspaper, which provides one of the initial reports on the first salvos against colonial militiamen and British soldiers at Lexington and Concord, 1775. All documents include a brief but illuminating introductory note. Again, the use of primary sources will truly entice the reader to delve deeper into the history that is the Continental Congress and the delegates who shaped this key moment in America's history.

The true essence of any good secondary or tertiary resource will come in the way it is indexed and the quality of its appendixes. *The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress* offers the researcher both. It offers a detailed Subject Index, which will help the readers to quickly find just what they are looking for, including individuals, places, battles, acts, and other items of interest related to the Continental Congresses. Grossman provides six appendixes which offer some very interesting details in a straightforward format: Delegates to the Continental Congress by State; Signers of the Declaration of Independence by Occupation; Signers of the Articles of Confederation by State; Presidents of the Continental Congress; Places and Times of Sessions of the Continental Congress; and Statistics on the Thirteen Colonies. Regardless of whether the researcher wants to leisurely browse the resource through the Table of Contents or knows exactly what he needs and heads straight for the indexes and appendixes, Grossman's style and format will ensure they find what they are looking for.

As mentioned before, Mark Grossman's 25-year journey of in-depth research resulted in the creation of the first-ever comprehensive resource dealing with the men and events that shaped the actions and reactions of the Continental Congresses, which ultimately would play an integral part in the American Revolution and the creation of the U.S. Constitution. *The Encyclopedia of the Continental Congress* is not only a valuable resource on the subject matter but offers the researcher a comprehensive Bibliography by type, including Books and Articles; Unpublished Dissertations, Masters Theses, and Other Works; Newspapers and

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Magazines Used; Continental Congress and Other Federal Colonial Documents; U.S. Government Documents Post-1789; Colonial and State Government Documents; Other U.S. Government Documents; British Government Documents; and Manuscript Collections. Such a bibliography will provide a reader with the means to dive headfirst into further research on the men, events, and actions of the Continental Congress as well as the American Revolution. It is a clear must have for any Academic Library's Reference Collection, let alone a historian who specializes in this era of American History."

-ARBA, November 2015

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