

MD REMEMBERS: Signers of an Enduring Rx

■ The heroic therapeutic measures recommended by Dr. Benjamin Rush have long since been replaced but the Declaration of Independence that was signed by the famous patriot-physician and several medical colleagues remains an enduring prescription for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. On this bicentennial of the cherished document, *MD* remembers the doctors who endorsed the nation's birth certificate. Edinburgh graduate Dr. Rush was the only one of the 56 signers who had re-

games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of the continent to the other."

It is assumed, but not proved, that the Liberty Bell rang when the final draft was adopted on July 4. The next day printed copies were sent to the former colonies and on July 8 citizens were summoned to Independence Hall to hear a public reading of the historic statement of freedom but it was signed without formal ceremonies on August 2. On that occasion when John Hancock reminded

lution of independency." To stimulate opposition to the tea tax, he published an article stating that tea caused nervous disorders. To marshal support for autonomy of the Colonies, he gave his notes to Thomas Paine, then named Paine's famous essay "Common Sense," and found the printer who risked publishing it. When the conservative Pennsylvania Assembly questioned the idea of freedom, Rush was a leader of the Whigs who left to form an illegal revolutionary assembly.

During the Continental Congress in 1774, Rush entertained George Washington, inoculated Patrick Henry against smallpox, and provided hospitality for Samuel and John Adams, who wrote to his wife that a dinner at the physician's home included "the very best of Claret, Madeira and Burgundy, melons, fine beyond description."

On the expiration of his term in Congress, Dr. Rush joined the Army in 1777 as surgeon and later physician-general of the "middle department," but he soon protested director-general William Shippen's management of the military hospitals and was forced to resign after nine months. While the British occupied Philadelphia, Rush lived in Princeton studying law and writing indignant letters, but he hurried home as soon as the enemy troops left the city. As a member of the Pennsylvania Convention of 1789, he argued zealously for ratification of the Constitution and during the yellow fever epidemics of the 1790s he worked tirelessly visiting patients from dawn to dusk. Before his death in 1813, he served for 16 years as treasurer of the mint.

Although Rush alienated most of his colleagues, he was the admired teacher of some 3000 students, the respected doctor of hosts of patients, and the first American physician to achieve an international reputation. He founded the country's first free dispensary, Philadelphia's College of Physicians, and Dickinson College, campaigned for prison reform, the abolition of capital punishment



Scene from Bicentennial play sponsored by Merck, Sharp & Dohme in Philadelphia portrays Dr. and Mrs. Rush asking Pres. John Adams, right, to consider appointing Dr. Rush Treasurer of the U.S. Mint.

ceived an M.D. but Lyman Hall of Georgia, Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut, George Taylor of Pennsylvania, Josiah Bartlett, and Matthew Thornton of New Hampshire had practiced or studied medicine.

Although the Declaration was adopted by the Continental Congress on the evening of July 4, many points in the document and some of its phraseology were contained in a resolution submitted on June 24 by a committee chaired by Dr. Rush. With Dr. Bartlett casting the first "yea and amen," the resolution was passed on July 2, the day that John Adams predicted would be forever more "solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows,

his fellow delegates: "We must be unanimous. . . we must all hang together," Benjamin Franklin replied: "Yes, we must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." Those present concurred but Matthew Thornton, who was not elected to the Congress until September, Oliver Wolcott, who was ill, and two other delegates signed later in the year.

Revolutionary Gadfly. Rush, who was considered a radical in politics as well as medicine, was only 30 when he took his seat in the Continental Congress, but he had already developed a large practice and played an active role in events that led to "the reso-