



## LESSON 1

1700

1725

1730

1770

1775

1800

# THE ROAD TO SELF-GOVERNMENT

### READ ALOUD

*In 1741 angry members of the Massachusetts assembly tried to remove Governor Jonathan Belcher from office. The king of England had appointed Belcher, but the assembly members did not like him. The governor complained about the members. They think, he said, "that they are as big as the Parliament of Great Britain."*

### THE BIG PICTURE

As you read in Chapter 9, the number of people in the English colonies grew in the 1700s. They gained experience in governing themselves. The colonists had been creating their own governing bodies and laws since the early 1600s. Some had their own written laws, but most used English laws to govern themselves. They modeled their colonial **assemblies**, or law-making bodies, on Parliament. Parliament is Britain's law-making body.

As you read in Chapter 7, the first meeting of Virginia's assembly, the House of Burgesses, took place in Jamestown in 1619. This first colonial assembly was a model for others. In this lesson you will read about how the colonists' desire for self-government led to the founding of some of the rights that people in our country enjoy today.

### Focus Activity

#### READ TO LEARN

How did the colonists begin to govern themselves?

#### VOCABULARY

assembly  
town meeting  
militia  
delegate

#### PEOPLE

Thomas Jefferson  
Richard Henry Lee  
John Adams  
John Peter Zenger  
Phillis Wheatley

#### PLACE

Williamsburg



## COLONIAL GOVERNMENT

Laws for each colony were made by the colonial assemblies. In New England, the **town meeting** was the earliest form of self-government. The town meeting was a group of male colonists who got together to solve local problems.

Other colonies created written plans for government. These plans spelled out important rights that the colonists would have. The chart on this page lists some of the plans for government that were used in the colonies in the 1600s.

## Royal Governors

Eight of the 13 colonies were ruled by royal governors. A royal governor was chosen by the king of England. He made sure British laws were obeyed. Sometimes the governor and the assembly did not agree about which laws had to be obeyed. If the assembly did not support him, the governor could shut it down.

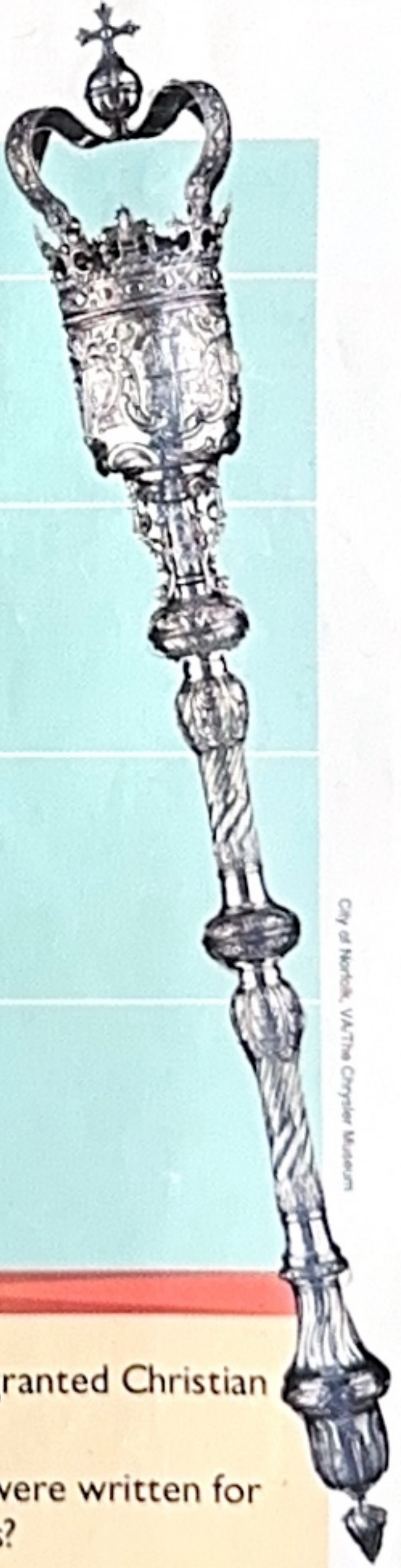
Assembly members could then refuse to vote for money for the governor's plans. Royal governors did not always have the same point of view as the assembly members.

PLANS FOR GOVERNMENT IN THE COLONIES, 1600s	
1620	<i>Mayflower Compact</i> <i>A</i> written agreement to make laws for the Plymouth colony
1639	<i>Fundamental Orders of Connecticut</i> <i>A</i> written plan for government that gave the right to vote to free men who owned property in Connecticut
1649	<i>Maryland Toleration Act</i> <i>A</i> law giving religious freedom to all Christians in Maryland
1682	<i>Pennsylvania Frame of Government</i> <i>A</i> written plan for government that granted religious freedom to colonists in Pennsylvania

**CHART WORK**

At right is a 1753 mace from Norfolk, Virginia. The mace, a club-shaped staff, was used to call an **assembly** to order. A mace is used today in the United States House of Representatives.

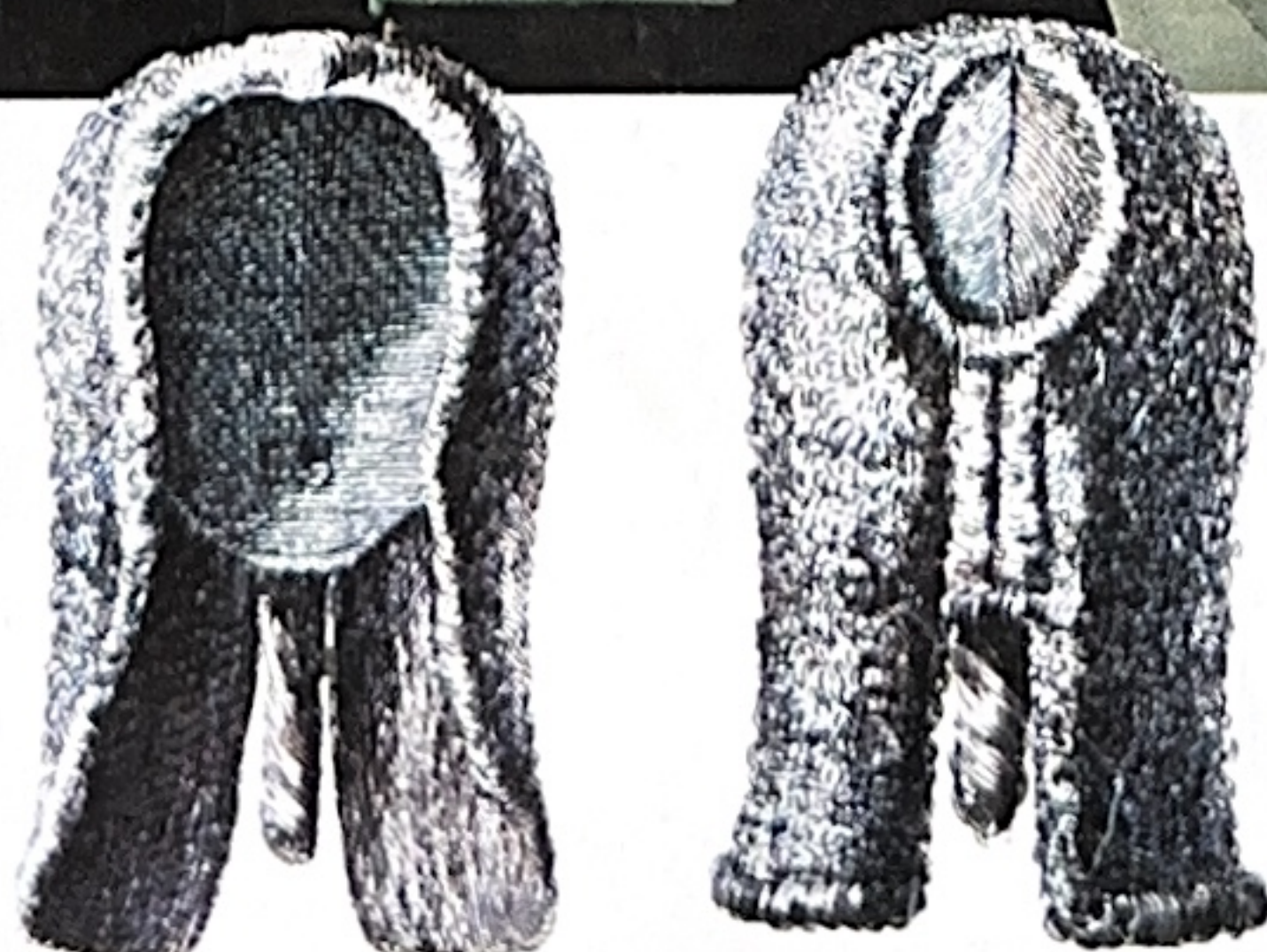
1. Which plans for government granted Christian colonists freedom of religion?
2. Which plans for government were written for two of New England's colonies?





## THE VIRGINIA HOUSE OF BURGESSES

In 1624 King James of Britain had made Virginia a royal colony. He appointed a royal governor to rule the colony. The House of Burgesses still had some power. It could decide to divide large counties into smaller ones. It could also make laws about the sale of tobacco. The colonial burgesses gained much valuable experience in self-government.



## The Talented Burgesses

On a spring day in 1769, **Thomas Jefferson** traveled to **Williamsburg**, Virginia's capital. At 26 years of age, he had just been elected burgess. Jefferson admired the men who were members of the House of Burgesses.

Most of the burgesses were wealthy planters. George Washington and **Richard Henry Lee** served as burgesses. They felt it was their

duty to help govern the colony. But sometimes the assembly could make them angry and try their patience. Lee admitted he was disappointed that he did not get much work done:

*I find the attendance on Assemblies so expensive, and the power of doing good so rarely occurring, that I am determined to quit.*

Many burgesses got tired of the formal ceremonies that took up most of their day.

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The Virginia House of Burgesses met in this room (left) in the 1700s. They wore wigs like these.





The House of Burgesses did make important laws for the colony. The burgesses had the power to print money, call for taxes, build roads, and make land laws. They also had the power to prepare for war and raise money to support the colony's **militia**. A colonial militia was a force made up of volunteers. The militia was similar to today's National Guard, which is made up of citizen soldiers.

### A Model for the Colonies

By 1760 every colony had elected men to be in an assembly like the House of Burgesses. To be elected a **delegate**, or member of the assembly, a person had to be an adult white male. In most colonies he had to own land and be a Protestant. In most colonies women, African Americans, Catholics, Jews, and Native Americans could not be elected.

Most delegates were wealthy merchants or lawyers. In 1770 a lawyer named **John Adams** was elected to the Massachusetts assembly. Benjamin Franklin was pleased to be in the Pennsylvania assembly. Franklin wrote that he was "flattered."

### Early Colonial Elections

Elections in the colonies were noisy. An election "causes a Hubbub for a week or so," wrote one of the Virginia colonists. To Virginians an election was quite an event.



Thomas Jefferson (left) was painted by C. W. Peale. Richard Henry Lee (below) also supported the colonies' rights.



On election day men gathered at the court house or village common. Voters looked forward to the tasty cookies and cakes given out by the candidates. George Washington gave out similar food and drink during his first election to the Virginia House of Burgesses.

Unlike today's secret voting, each voter spoke his choice in front of a large crowd. Cheers or boos would follow each vote.