

Name _____



Colonial Communication

By Sharon Fabian

The early colonists had to devise their own methods of communication. Not only didn't they have the modern methods of communication that we have today; they didn't have any organized way to communicate at first.

If a colonist wanted to send a message to a family member or to a business back in England, the only way was to write a letter and send it back across the Atlantic Ocean by ship. A reply, if it came at all, could take many months.

The colonists often did not even have this one method of communication when it came to communicating with other colonies. Gradually they developed methods of their own. Some of the methods of communications used in the early days of the colonies were horseback messengers, newspapers, broadsides, and even town criers.

The colonists who had lived in towns back in England were familiar with a town crier. The town crier shouted out news and announcements in a common meeting area in town. He might cry out the news from the steps of a local inn or on a busy street corner. Sometimes, town criers announced news and important events in this same way in the new colonies, but as more people learned to read, town criers gradually went out of business.

Broadsides were used from the early days in the colonies to spread news in the form of print. A broadside was a poster printed something like a newspaper article and designed to attract the attention of people passing by. It would have been "published" by nailing it to a tree, a pole, or the side of a building. Broadsides spread important news, made announcements of public interest, and recruited men for military service. They also advertised products, services, and upcoming entertainments.

Broadsides were also posted to argue for or against controversial issues. Many broadsides encouraged the colonists to stick together against the British. For example, broadsides were posted arguing against the Stamp Act that so many colonists hated.

The early colonists also tried publishing newspapers; however, newspapers did not become popular until the mid-1700's. The first newspapers were probably only one page, printed on both sides. They may have been published weekly, and at first probably contained more news from England than from the colonies themselves. European wars and speeches by famous European leaders might have been the lead stories. Local news such as a fire or an accident might also have been featured. The arrival of a ship in the colonies was always news too.

The first colonial newspaper to publish continuously was the Boston News-Letter which began publication in 1704. From earliest times, colonial newspapers took on the role of keeping an eye on the government to see what it was up to, and newspapers still make that their responsibility today.

Sometimes a colonist needed to send an individual message, not publish it for everyone to see. Then they used a messenger on horseback. These early messengers used whatever roads and trails were available to get their messages delivered. Later, their paths developed into the post roads used by the postal service. Messengers played an important role in keeping the new colonial governments operating. A government operating in one town could share its ideas and its successes with other towns by sending a messenger. Soon, most local governments had developed their own committee of correspondence to keep the messages flowing.

People have always needed some way to communicate with each other. Years before the beginning of the postal service or any kind of electronic communication, the colonists had developed several ways.

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Questions

- _____ 1. The early colonists communicated by _____.
- A. broadsides
 - B. both
 - C. town criers
 - D. neither

