

The Signers of the Declaration of Independence

All of the colonies were represented in Philadelphia to consider the delicate case for independence and to change the course of the war. In all, there were fifty-six representatives from the thirteen colonies. Fourteen represented the New England Colonies, twenty-one represented the Middle Colonies and twenty-one represented the Southern Colonies. The largest number (9) came from Pennsylvania. Most of the signers were American born although eight were foreign born. The ages of the signers ranged from 26 (Edward Rutledge) to 70 (Benjamin Franklin), but the majority of the signers were in their thirties or forties. More than half of the signers were lawyers and the others were planters, merchants and shippers. Together they mutually pledged "to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." They were mostly men of means who had much to lose if the war was lost. None of the signers died at the hands of the British, and one-third served as militia officers during the war. Four of the signers were taken captive during the war and nearly all of them were poorer at the end of the war than at the beginning. No matter what each of these men did after July 1776, the actual signing of the Declaration of Independence which began on August 2 ensured them instant immortality. The following gives a bit of information about each signer AFTER the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Connecticut

Samuel Huntington (1731-1796)—Samuel Huntington was a self-made man who distinguished himself in government on the state and national levels. He was the President of Congress from 1779-1781 and presided over the adoption of the Articles of Confederation in 1781. He returned to Connecticut and was the Chief Justice of the Superior Court in 1784, Lieutenant Governor in 1785 and Governor from 1786-1796. He was one of the first seven presidential electors from Connecticut.

Roger Sherman (1723-1793)—Roger Sherman was a member of the Committee of Five that was chosen to write the Declaration of Independence. He and Robert Morris were the only individuals to sign the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. He was the Judge of the Superior Court of Connecticut from 1766-1789, a member of the Continental Congress from 1774-81; 1783-84 and a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Sherman proposed the famed "Connecticut Compromise" at the convention and represented Connecticut in the United States Senate from 1791-93.

William Williams (1731-1811)—William Williams was a graduate of Harvard, studied theology with his father and eventually became a successful merchant. He fought in the French-Indian War and returned to Lebanon, Connecticut where he served for forty-four years as the town clerk. He was elected to the Continental Congress from 1776-1777, and after signing the Declaration of Independence, Williams was a member of the committee that was instrumental in framing the Articles of Confederation. He was a delegate to vote on the ratification of the Federal Constitution and also served as a Judge of the Windham County Courthouse.

Connecticut *(Continued)*

Oliver Wolcott (1726-1797)—Oliver Wolcott was as much a soldier as he was a politician and served as a brigadier general in the New York campaigns from 1776-1777. As a major general, he was involved in defending the Connecticut coast from attacks by the Royal Governor of New York. He was Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1775 and from 1784-89, a delegate to the Continental Congress from 1775-76 and 1778-84, Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut from 1786-96 and Governor from 1796-97.

Delaware

Thomas McKean (1734-1817)—Thomas McKean was the last member of the Second Continental Congress to sign the Declaration of Independence. He was a delegate to the Continental Congress from 1774-81 and served as a delegate to the Congress of the Confederation from 1781-1783. After 1783, McKean became involved in the politics of Pennsylvania becoming Chief Justice of Pennsylvania and the Governor of Pennsylvania from 1799-1812. He retired from politics in 1812 and died at the age of 83 in 1817.

George Read (1733-1798)—George Read was the only signer of the Declaration of Independence who voted against the proposal for independence introduced by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia. He was elected to the Continental Congress from 1774-1776, was a member of the Delaware Constitutional Convention in 1776, acting Governor of Delaware in 1777, a Judge on the Court of Appeals in 1780, State Senator from 1791-92, a United States Senator from 1789-1793 and Chief Justice of the State of Delaware from 1793-98.

Caesar Rodney (1728-1784)—Caesar Rodney took a strong stand in favor of independence and because of that, was not reelected to Congress because of the conservatives in the state of Delaware. They also blocked his election to the state legislature and his appointment to the state's constitutional convention. He was interested in military affairs and was involved in action in Delaware and New Jersey during the Revolutionary War. He was reelected to Congress in 1777 and was nominated as state president from 1778-1781. He died in 1784 while serving as Speaker of the Upper House of the Delaware Assembly.

Georgia

Button Gwinnett (1735-1777)—After the Governor died in 1777, Button Gwinnett served as the Acting Governor of Georgia for two months, but did not achieve reelection. His life was one of economic and political disappointment. Button Gwinnett was the second signer of the Declaration to die as the result of a duel outside Savannah, Georgia.

Lyman Hall (1724-1790)—Lyman Hall was one of four signers trained as a minister and was a graduate of Princeton College. During his life he also served as a doctor, governor and planter. During the Revolutionary War, his property was destroyed and he was accused of treason. He left Georgia and spent time in South Carolina and Connecticut to escape prosecution. When the war was over, he went back to Georgia and began to practice medicine. He served as Governor of Georgia from 1783-1784.

Georgia *(Continued)*

George Walton (1741-1804)—George Walton was elected to the Continental Congress in 1776, 1777, 1780 and 1781, Colonel of the First Georgia Militia, in 1778, Governor of Georgia from 1779-1780, Chief Justice of the State Superior Court of Georgia from 1783-89, a presidential elector in 1789, Governor of Georgia from 1789-1790 and a United States Senator from 1795-1796. During the Revolutionary War, Walton was captured by the British in 1778 during the attack on Savannah and released within the year. He was the founder of the Richmond Academy and Franklin College which later became the University of Georgia.

Maryland

Charles Carroll (1737-1832)—Charles Carroll was one of the wealthiest men in America and was the oldest and longest surviving signer of the Declaration. From 1789-1792 he served as one of Maryland's two United States Senators. He retired from politics in 1804 and spent the rest of his life managing his 80,000 acres of land in Maryland, Pennsylvania and New York.

Samuel Chase (1741-1811)—Samuel Chase was called the “Demosthenes of Maryland” for his oratorical skills. In 1785 he represented Maryland at the Mt. Vernon conference to settle a dispute between Maryland and Virginia concerning navigation rights on the Potomac River. He served as an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court from 1796-1811. He was the only Supreme Court justice to be impeached in 1805. He was charged with discriminating against supporters of Thomas Jefferson, and he was found to be not guilty.

William Paca (1740-1799)—William Paca was elected to the Continental Congress from 1774-78, appointed Chief Justice of Maryland in 1778, Governor of Maryland from 1782-1785 and Federal District Judge for the State of Maryland from 1789-99. He was also a planter and a lawyer, but was a relatively minor figure in national affairs. William Paca also served as a delegate to the Maryland ratification convention for the Federal Constitution.

Thomas Stone (1743-1787)—Thomas Stone was one of the most conservative of the signers along with Carter Braxton of Virginia, George Read of Delaware and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina. He was elected to the Congress from 1775-78 and again in 1783. He was chosen to be a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 but had to decline because of the poor health of his wife. Shortly after she died in 1787, a grief stricken Stone died a few months later before making a trip to England.

Massachusetts

John Adams (1735-1826)—John Adams was the first Vice-President of the United States and the second President. He was a member (along with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman) chosen to draft the Declaration of Independence. He was the first President to attend Harvard University and the first to have a son become president.

Samuel Adams (1722-1803)—Samuel Adams was known as the “Firebrand of the Revolution” for his role as an agitator between the colonists and the British prior to the outbreak of hostilities on April 1775. He served in the Continental Congress until 1781 and was a member of the Massachusetts State Senate from 1781-1788. Because he was opposed to a stronger national government, Adams refused to attend the Constitutional Convention in 1787. He served as Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts from 1789-1793 and Governor from 1794-1797.

Elbridge Gerry (1744-1814)—Elbridge Gerry served for a time as a member of the state legislature of Massachusetts. Although he attended the meetings in Philadelphia to write a new Constitution, at the end he was opposed to it because it lacked a bill of rights. However, after a “change of heart,” he was a member of the House of Representatives for the first two Congresses from 1789-1793. He was Governor of Massachusetts in 1810 and 1811 and died in office as Vice-President under James Madison in 1814.

John Hancock (1737-1793)—John Hancock was the President of the Second Continental Congress when the Declaration of Independence was adopted. He, along with Samuel Adams, were the two most wanted men in the colonies by King George III. He served as a major general during the Revolutionary War. He was elected Governor of Massachusetts from 1780-1785 and 1787 until his death in 1793. He was the seventh President of the United States in Congress assembled, from November 23, 1785 to June 6, 1786. John Hancock was one of the original “fathers” of U.S. independence.

Robert Treat Paine (1731-1814)—Robert Treat Paine was elected to the Continental Congress, in 1774 and 1776, Attorney General for Massachusetts from 1777-1796, Judge, Supreme Court of Massachusetts from 1796-1804 and State Counselor in 1804. During his time in Congress, Paine concentrated primarily on military and Indian concerns. Because of his opposition to many proposals, he was known as the “Objection Maker.” Paine was one of the original founders of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

New Hampshire

Josiah Bartlett (1729-1795)—Josiah Bartlett served in Congress until 1779 and then refused reelection because of fatigue. On the state level he served as the first Chief Justice of the Common Pleas (1779-1782), Associate (1782-1788) and Chief justice of the Superior Court (1788-1790). Bartlett founded the New Hampshire Medical Society in 1791 and was the Governor of New Hampshire (1793-1794).

Matthew Thornton (1714-1803)—Matthew Thornton served as Speaker of the New Hampshire House of Representatives, was an Associate Justice of the Superior Court and was elected to the Continental Congress in 1776. He was one of six members who signed the Declaration of Independence after it was adopted by the Continental Congress. He left Congress to return to New Hampshire to become an Associate Justice of the State Superior Court. He spent his remaining years farming and operating a ferry on the Merrimack River.

William Whipple (1730-1785)—William Whipple was a former sea captain who commanded troops during the Revolutionary War and was a member of the Continental Congress from 1776-1779. General Whipple was involved in the successful defeat of General John Burgoyne at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777. He was a state legislator in New Hampshire from 1780-1784, Associate Justice of the New Hampshire Superior Court from 1782-1785, and a receiver for finances for the Congress of the Confederation. He suffered from heart problems and died while traveling his court circuit in 1785.

New Jersey

Abraham Clark (1726-1794)—Abraham Clark was a farmer, surveyor and politician who spent most of his life in public service. He was a member of the New Jersey state legislature, represented his state at the Annapolis Convention in 1786, and was opposed to the Constitution until it incorporated a bill of rights. He served in the United States Congress for two terms from 1791 until his death in 1794.

John Hart (1711-1779)—John Hart became the Speaker of the Lower House of the New Jersey state legislature. His property was destroyed by the British during the course of the Revolutionary War, and his wife died three months after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. During the ravaging of his home, Hart spent time in the Sourland Mountains in exile.

Francis Hopkinson (1737-1791)—Francis Hopkinson was a judge and lawyer by profession but also was a musician, poet and artist. When the Revolutionary War was over, he became one of the most respected writers in the country. He was later appointed Judge to the U.S. Court for the District of Pennsylvania in 1790.

New Jersey *(Continued)*

Richard Stockton (1730-1781)—Richard Stockton was trained to be a lawyer and graduated from the College of New Jersey. He was elected to the Continental Congress in 1776 and was the first of the New Jersey delegation to sign the Declaration of Independence. In November 1776 he was captured by the British and was eventually released in 1777 in very poor physical condition. His home at Morven was destroyed by the British during the war and he died in 1781 at the age of 50.

John Witherspoon (1723-1794)—John Witherspoon was the only active clergyman among the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He was elected to the Continental Congress from 1776-1782, elected to the state legislature in New Jersey from 1783-1789 and was the president of the College of New Jersey from 1768-1792. In his later years he spent a great deal of time trying to rebuild the College of New Jersey (Princeton).

New York

William Floyd (1734-1821)—William Floyd had his estate in New York destroyed by the British and Loyalists during the Revolutionary War. He was a member of the United States Congress from 1789-1791 and was a presidential elector from New York four times. He was later a major general in the New York militia and served as a state senator.

Francis Lewis (1713-1802)—Francis Lewis was one who truly felt the tragedy of the Revolutionary War. His wife died as an indirect result of being imprisoned by the British, and he lost all of his property on Long Island, New York during the war. When his wife died, Lewis left Congress and completely abandoned politics.

Philip Livingston (1716-1778)—Philip Livingston was not in Philadelphia to vote on the resolution for Independence, but did sign the actual Declaration of Independence on August 2, 1776. During the Revolutionary War, the British used Livingston's houses in New York as a navy hospital and a barracks for the troops. He was the third signer to die after John Morton of Pennsylvania and Button Gwinnett of Georgia.

Lewis Morris (1726-1798)—Lewis Morris was a delegate to the Continental Congress, from 1775-77, a county judge in Worchester, New York from 1777-1778, served in the New York state legislature from 1777-1781 and 1784-1788 and was a member of the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York. During the Revolutionary War, Morris was a brigadier-general in the New York state militia, and all three of his sons served under General George Washington.

North Carolina

John Hewes (1730-1779)—John Hewes was a merchant who was one of the most conservative signers of the Declaration of Independence. He was a graduate of Princeton College, and he along with John Adams helped to establish the Continental Navy. He was a member of the state legislature from 1778-1779 and was eventually reelected to the Continental Congress. He died a month after his reelection.

William Hooper (1742-1790)—William Hooper was a graduate of Harvard College and was highly successful in law and politics. Because of his family situation and financial difficulties, he resigned from Congress to return to North Carolina. During the war he was separated from his family for ten months and his property was destroyed. After the war, he was elected to the state legislature and served there through 1786.

John Penn (1740-1788)—John Penn was one of sixteen signers of the Declaration of Independence who also signed the Articles of Confederation. He was a member of the Continental Congress from 1775-77; 1779-80 and a member of the Board of War in 1780 which shared responsibility for military affairs with the governor. In 1784 he became a state tax receiver under the Articles of Confederation. After retiring from politics, he practiced law until his death in 1788.

Pennsylvania

George Clymer (1739-1813)—George Clymer had a great deal of financial talent and signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. His home was vandalized by the British in 1777 during the American Revolutionary War. He served in the Pennsylvania state legislature from 1784-1788 and was a member of the United States House of Representatives from 1789-1791. He was later appointed as “collector of taxes” on alcoholic beverages (especially whiskey) in Pennsylvania from 1791-1794.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)—After the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin helped to negotiate the Treaty of Alliance with France in 1778 and the Treaty of Paris which ended the Revolutionary War in 1783. He was one of the framers of the Constitution and was known as the “Sage of the Convention.” He was also elected President of the Pennsylvania Society for the Promoting of the Abolition of Slavery.

Robert Morris (1734-1806)—Robert Morris has been considered the “Financier of the Revolution,” and contributed his own money to help such causes as the support of troops at Valley Forge and the battles of Trenton and Princeton. In 1781 he suggested a plan that became the Bank of North America and was the Superintendent of Finance under the Articles of Confederation. Morris was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, and was later offered the position of Secretary of the Treasury under the administration of George Washington. He declined the position and suggested Alexander Hamilton who became our first Secretary of the Treasury. He served as a United States Senator from Pennsylvania from 1789-1795.

Pennsylvania *(Continued)*

John Morton (1725-1777)—John Morton was the first signer of the Declaration of Independence to die and was one of nine signers from Pennsylvania. He was elected to the Second Continental Congress from 1774-77, and was the chairman of the committee that reported the Articles of Confederation. He contracted an inflammatory fever and died in Ridley Park, Delaware County, Pa., in April 1777, and is buried in St. Paul's Burial Ground in Chester, Pennsylvania.

George Ross (1730-1779)—George Ross was elected to the Second Continental Congress from 1776-1777, was a colonel in the Continental Army in 1776; was Vice President of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention in 1776 and Judge of the Admiralty Court of Pennsylvania in 1779. He was not a member of Congress when it voted for independence on July 2, 1776. Because of illness, he was forced to resign his seat in Congress in 1777.

Benjamin Rush (1745-1813)—Benjamin Rush was elected to the Continental Congress in 1776, appointed Surgeon General in the Middle Department of the Continental Army in 1777, instructor and physician at the University of Pennsylvania in 1778, Treasurer of the U.S. Mint from 1779-1813, and professor of Medical Theory and Clinical Practice at the University of Pennsylvania from 1791-1813. During the Revolutionary War, Rush was part of an unsuccessful plot to relieve General George Washington of his military command. He was the most well-known doctor and medical instructor in the United States. He was a trustee of Dickinson College, helped to found the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and was a member of the American Philosophical Society.

James Smith (1719-1806)—James Smith was elected to the Continental Congress on July 20, 1776 after the votes had been taken on the resolution for independence and the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. From 1779-1782 he held a number of state offices including one term in the state legislature and a few months as a Judge of the state High Court of Appeals. He was also appointed a brigadier general in the Pennsylvania militia in 1782.

George Taylor (1716-1781)—George Taylor came to the colonies as an indentured servant and eventually was an Ironmaster at the Warwick Furnace and Coventry Forge. He was a member of the Continental Congress from 1775-1777. He returned to Pennsylvania and was elected to the new Supreme Executive Assembly, but served for a very short period of time because of illness and financial difficulties. His Durham Furnace manufactured ammunition for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

James Wilson (1742-1798)—James Wilson was elected to the Congress from 1775-77 and 1785-87, chosen to be one of the directors of the Bank of North America in 1781, a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and appointed by President George Washington to be an Associate Justice to the US. Supreme Court from 1789-1798. He experienced personal and financial difficulty in his later years and spent time in debtor's prison while serving on the Supreme Court.

South Carolina

Thomas Heyward, Jr. (1746-1809)—Thomas Heyward was a planter and lawyer and was one of three signers from South Carolina captured and imprisoned by the British. He signed the Articles of Confederation while a member of the Continental Congress. He returned to South Carolina and became a judge and a member of the state legislature. The British destroyed Heyward's home at White Hall during the war and he was held prisoner until 1781. After the war, he served two terms in the state legislature from 1782-1784. Thomas Heyward became the first President of the Agricultural Society of South Carolina.

Thomas Lynch, Jr. (1749-1779)—Thomas Lynch, Jr. was an aristocratic planter who was the youngest signer of the Declaration of Independence to die at the age of thirty. He was trained as a lawyer and graduated from Cambridge University in England, and was elected to the Second Continental Congress to carry on the duties of his ill father. Thomas Lynch Sr. and Thomas Lynch Jr. were the only father and son team to serve concurrently in the Continental Congress. Thomas Lynch, Jr. and his wife were enroute to France in 1779 when their ship was lost at sea.

Arthur Middleton (1742-1787)—Arthur Middleton was chosen to replace his more conservative father in the Continental Congress in 1776, but failed to attend most of the sessions. He was captured by the British and was held captive for over a year in St. Augustine, Florida. During the time of his incarceration, the British destroyed most of his property. After his release in 1781, Middleton returned to politics and served in the Virginia state legislature and was a trustee of the College of Charleston.

Edward Rutledge (1749-1800)—Edward Rutledge was elected to the Continental Congress from 1774-76 and 1779, a captain in the Charleston Battalion of Artillery from 1776-1779, a state legislator from 1782-1798, College of Electors in the presidential elections of 1788, 1792, 1796 and elected Governor for South Carolina in 1798. He was the youngest of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. During the Revolutionary War, Rutledge was a military captain involved in the campaigns at Port Royal Island and Charleston, South Carolina. He was captured by the British in 1780 and held as a prisoner until 1781. From 1782-1798 Rutledge was a member of the state legislature and was elected Governor in 1798.

Rhode Island

William Ellery (1727-1820)—William Ellery served with distinction in the Congress of the Confederation until 1786 when he accepted the post of Commissioner of the Continental Loan Office of Rhode Island. He served in that position until 1790 when he was appointed Customs Collector in Newport. Although the British destroyed his home during the American Revolution, Ellery was later able to rebuild his fortune.

Stephen Hopkins (1707-1785)—Stephen Hopkins was the second oldest signer of the Declaration of Independence (next to Benjamin Franklin). He served on the committee that was responsible for the creation of the Articles of Confederation. He was forced to resign from the Congress in 1776 because of health problems, but was elected to the state legislature of Rhode Island upon his return.

Virginia

Carter Braxton (1736-1797)—Carter Braxton was elected to the Virginia state legislature after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and also served on the Governor's Executive Council. The American Revolutionary War caused him great hardship and he died in financial ruin in Richmond, Virginia.

Benjamin Harrison (1726-1791)—Benjamin Harrison was nicknamed the “Falstaff of Congress” and was the father of President William Henry Harrison and great-grandfather of President Benjamin Harrison. He was the Speaker of the Lower House of the Virginia state legislature from 1777-1781 and served three terms as Governor of Virginia from 1781-1783. He was originally in opposition of the new Federal Constitution, but later favored it when it was decided to add a bill of rights.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)—Thomas Jefferson was the chief author of the Declaration of Independence. He was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1776-79, elected Governor of Virginia in 1779 and 1780, the Associate Envoy to France in 1784, Minister to the French Court in 1785, United States Secretary of State from 1789-1793, Vice President of the United States from 1791-1801, President of the United States from 1801-1809 and established the University of Virginia in 1810. He was one of the most brilliant men of his time.

Francis Lightfoot Lee (1734-1797)—Francis Lightfoot Lee was the younger brother of Richard Henry Lee. He signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation as well as serving on both the military and marine committees during his time in Congress. He left Congress in 1779 and served a few years in the Virginia state legislature.

Richard Henry Lee (1732-1794)—Richard Henry Lee introduced the resolution for independence to the Second Continental Congress in June 1776. He was a Virginia state legislator from 1780-1784 and served in the national Congress again from 1784-1789. He was initially opposed to the Constitution because it lacked a bill of rights, but he was elected Senator from Virginia from 1789-1792. However, Lee was forced to resign in 1792 due to poor health.

Thomas Nelson, Jr. (1738-1789)—Thomas Nelson, Jr. had his Congressional career shortened because of health problems. He served as the commanding General of the Lower Virginia Militia during the Revolutionary War. He was a delegate to the Continental Congress from 1775-77; 1779 and was elected Governor of Virginia in 1781 after Thomas Jefferson declined reelection. He spent his remaining years handling his business affairs.

Virginia *(Continued)*

George Wythe (1726-1806)—George Wythe was more well-known as being a classical scholar who taught such great men as Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, John Marshall and Henry Clay. He was elected to the Continental Congress from 1775-76, Speaker of the Virginia House from 1777-78 and judge of the Chancery Court of Virginia from 1789-1806. He was also appointed the first chair of law at the College of William and Mary. Wythe died mysteriously in 1806 by being poisoned.



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