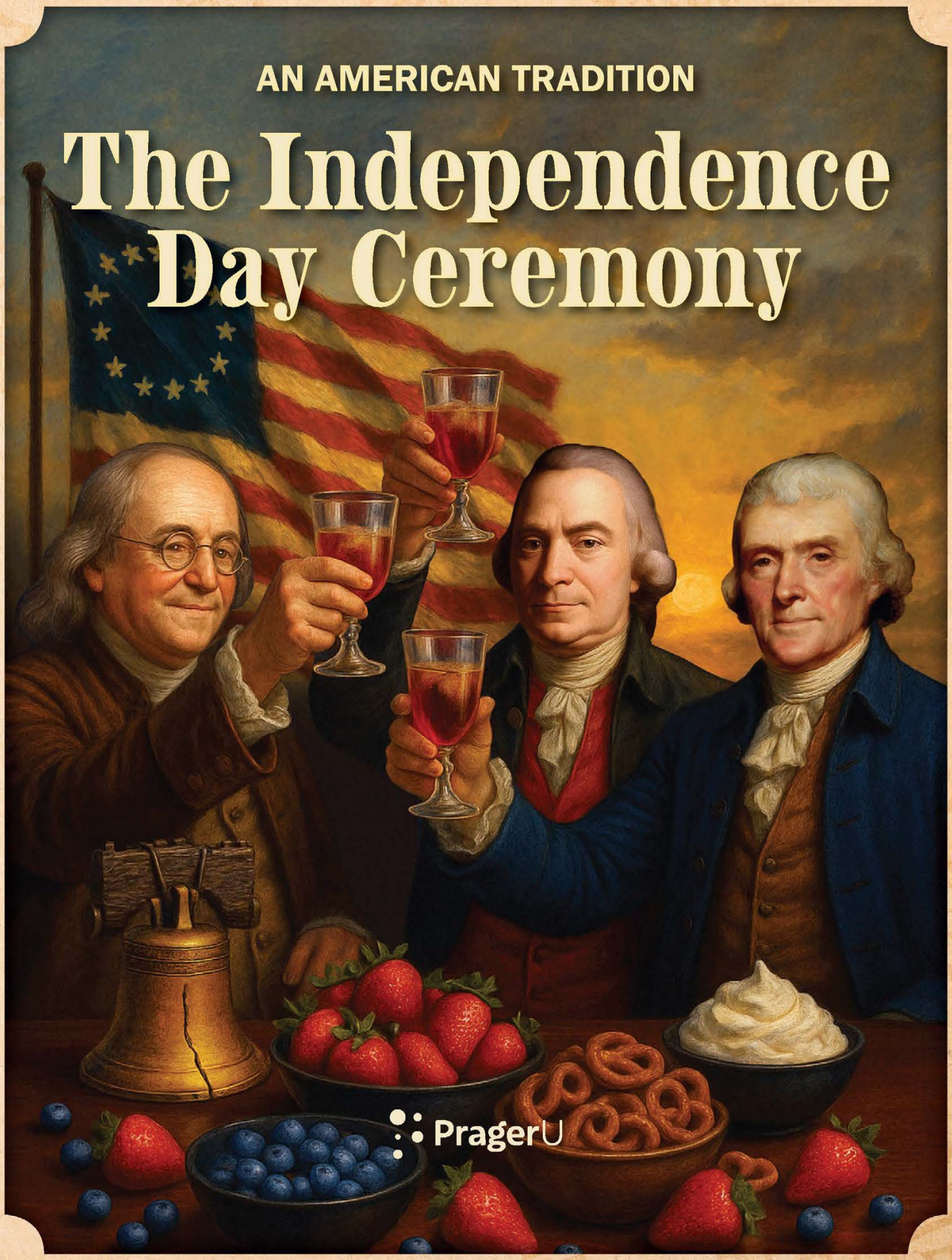
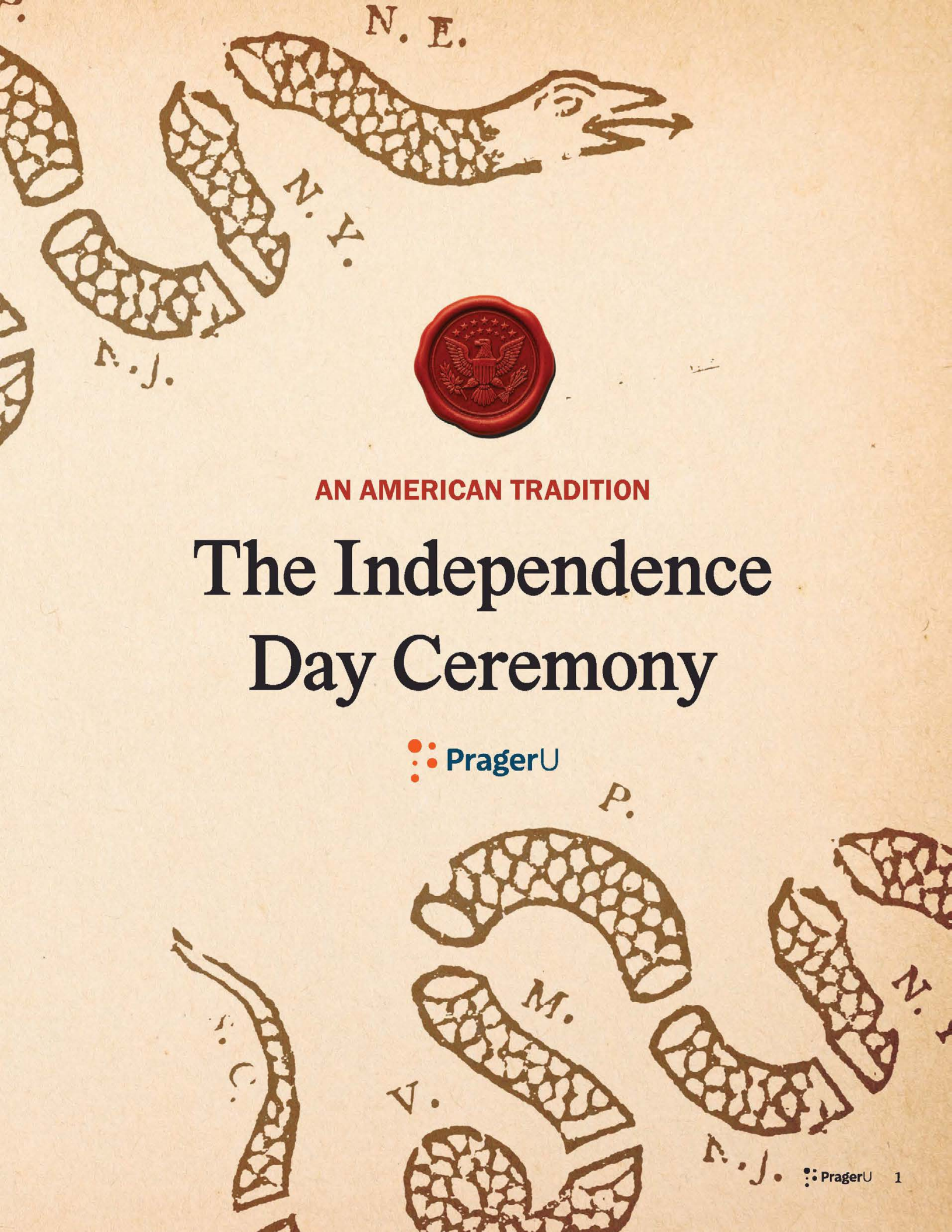
AN AMERICAN TRADITION

The Independence Day Ceremony

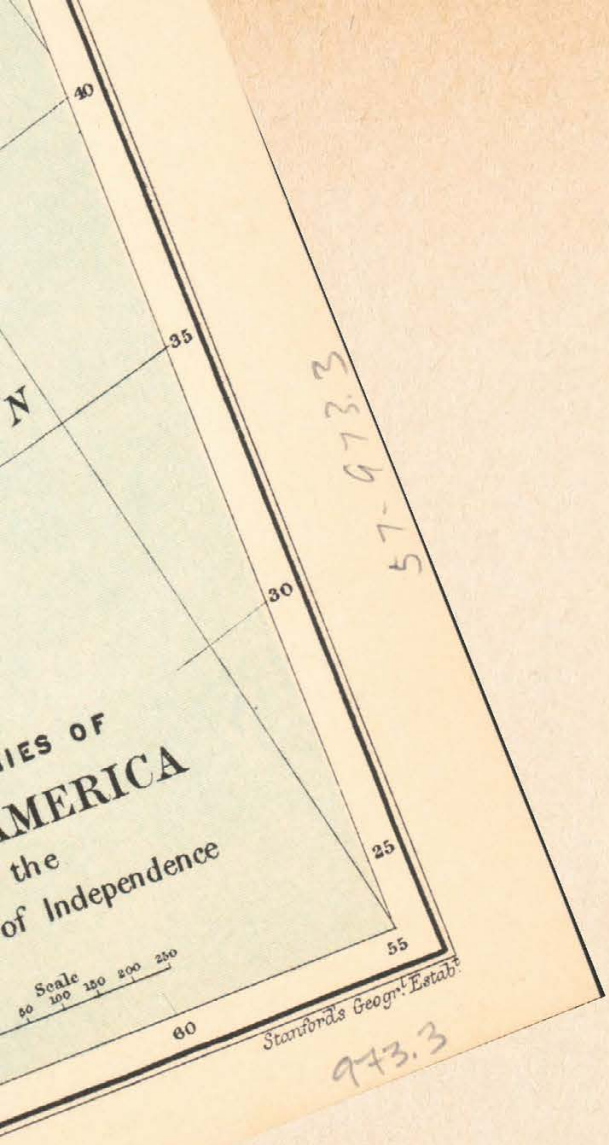




AN AMERICAN TRADITION

The Independence Day Ceremony

PragerU



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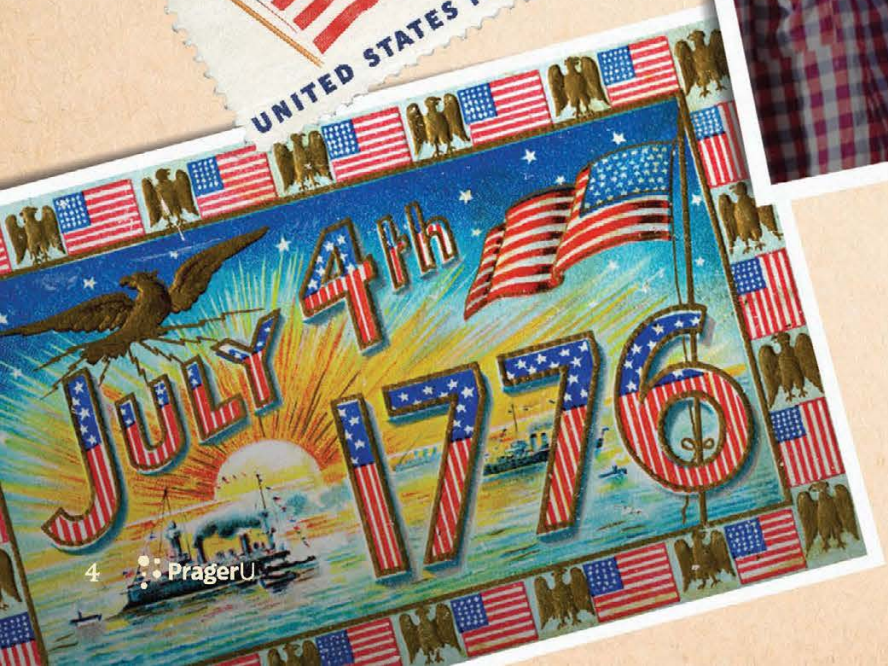
JULY 4, 1959
UNITED STATES POSTAGE


JULY 4th
1776

Introduction

Every year on the Fourth of July, Americans gather for fireworks, food, and fun. These celebrations are joyful and patriotic—but often, they leave out something essential: the story of our freedom, the courage of those who secured it, and the meaning behind this historic day.

This book was created to fill that gap with something more—a family-friendly tradition that doesn't just mark the holiday, but honors the heart of Independence Day. Inspired by the Jewish Passover Seder, where families retell the story of their journey from slavery to freedom, this Independence Day Ceremony invites Americans to do the same: to remember our struggle, reflect on our values, and pass on our national story to the next generation.

The ceremony is designed to be interactive and meaningful, allowing families and communities to come together in celebration and remembrance. It honors the bravery of the Founding Fathers, the perseverance of the patriots, and the enduring promise of liberty and justice for all.

In addition to the ceremony script, this book includes:

A timeline of key events in the Revolutionary War

Profiles of important figures who shaped our nation's birth

A summary of major battles and turning points in the fight for independence

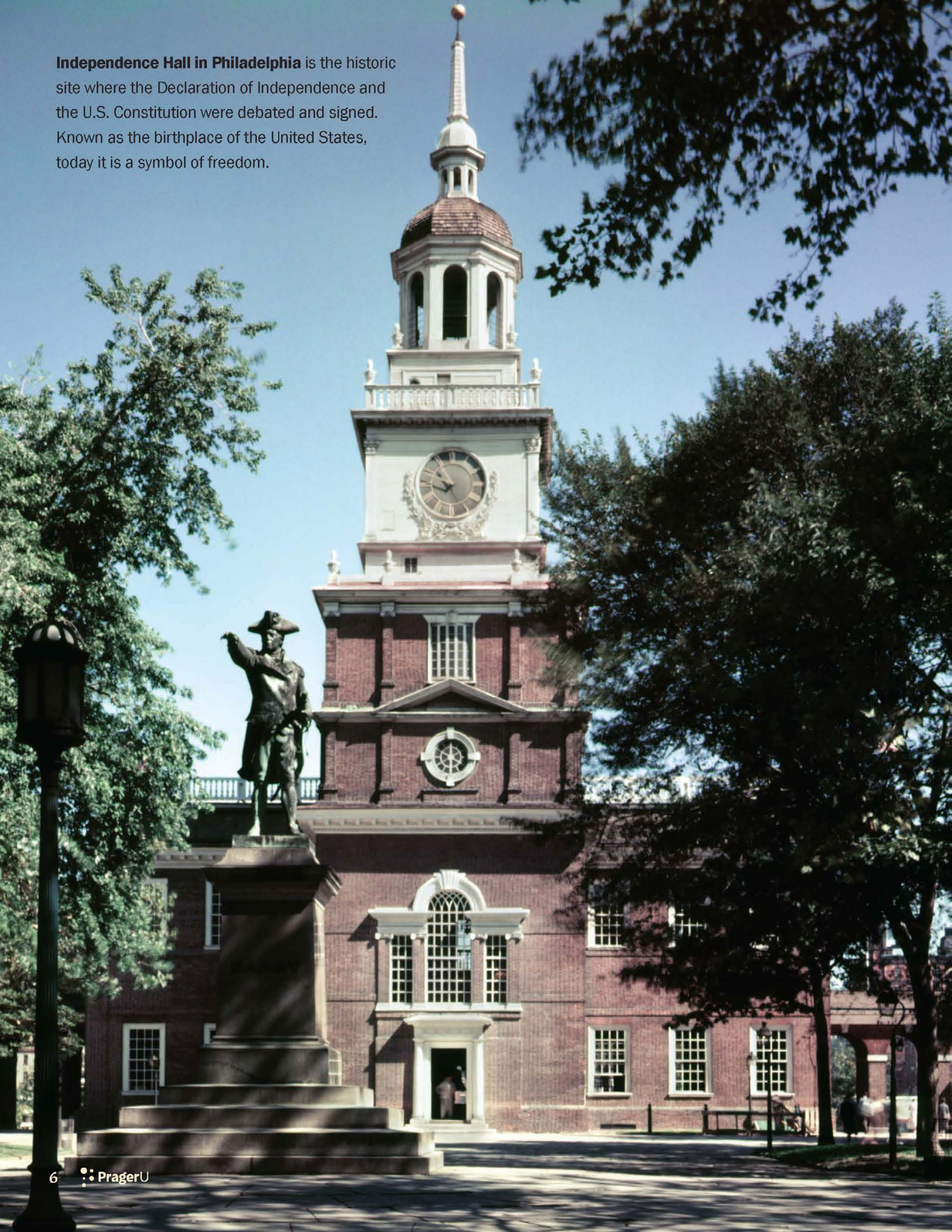
Historical background on what led to the Declaration of Independence

A fun, family-friendly quiz to reinforce learning in an engaging way

Whether you're a history lover, a parent seeking to instill deeper meaning in the holiday, or a proud American eager to honor our roots, this book offers a new way to celebrate. It transforms the Fourth of July from a day of entertainment into a moment of education, connection, and patriotic gratitude.

We invite you to make this ceremony a yearly tradition in your home. Let it be a time to remember the price of freedom, honor those who sacrificed for it, and teach the next generation what it truly means to be American.

Welcome to the Independence Day Ceremony.
Let us celebrate not just with fireworks—but with purpose.



Independence Hall in Philadelphia is the historic site where the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were debated and signed. Known as the birthplace of the United States, today it is a symbol of freedom.

The Independence Day Ceremony

A FAMILY-FRIENDLY EXPLANATION & CELEBRATION OF AMERICA'S INDEPENDENCE DAY

We hope this Independence Day finds you, your family, and your friends in good health and that you are enjoying another happy occasion together! We all love the barbecues, the parties, and the fireworks that traditionally accompany this occasion... but, if that's all the 4th of July is about, the day loses its meaning, and we lose a vital connection to our past.

Welcome to our 4th of July Declaration Ceremony!

This brief ceremony is designed to remind us how fortunate we are to be Americans, on our nation's birthday. We have modeled our celebration after the Jewish Passover Seder, probably the best-known commemoration of a historical event in the world—it has kept the memory of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt alive for over 3,000 years. As Americans, we need to reconnect to our Founding Fathers and rediscover the meaning behind our country's creation. And we need to do it every year—to help us remember. Without memory, life—whether of an individual or a nation—is meaningless.

In keeping with PragerU's longtime philosophy—that profound concepts can be taught in just five minutes—we have created this ceremony to teach children to celebrate the birth of our exceptional country and reinforce the ideals our Founding Fathers honored for our United States of America.

Materials & Ingredients Needed:

- Sweet iced tea
- Salty pretzels
- Strawberries, blueberries & whipped cream (but any goodies colored red, white, and blue will do)
- A small bell (the ringer on your cell phone can work in a pinch)
- An American coin (the bigger, the better... a half dollar is ideal, but a quarter will do)
- A printed (unsigned) Declaration of Independence
- Lyrics to "God Bless America" for all your guests

Independence Day Ceremony Instructions

1. CEREMONY BEGINS:

Gather everyone around a table.

2. HOST SPEAKS:

Today, we take a few minutes to remember what the 4th of July is about and remind ourselves how fortunate we are to be Americans. Before America was a nation, it was a dream—a dream shared by many people over many generations. In 1620, the Pilgrims fled Europe and ventured toward the New World, so they could be free to practice their religion as they saw fit. Through the centuries, more and more people came to this New World, where it wasn't your past that was important; it was your future.

As more and more people came, they started to see themselves not as Europeans, but as Americans. The land was open and spacious. The opportunities were limitless. By 1776, a century and a half after the first Pilgrims landed, the citizens were ready to break away from the Old World of Europe and create a new nation. On July 4 of 1776, they did just that. They pronounced themselves free from the tyranny of the King of England. We know this pronouncement as The Declaration of Independence. This dream of independence didn't become real by accident. The American dream became real because good people took action and were prepared to die for the least realized of all human dreams —liberty.

3. HOST INVITES CHILDREN TO READ AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Question #1:

Why do we celebrate the 4th of July?

Answer:

Because the 4th of July is the birthday of the American people—the day we chose to become the United States of America, a free and independent nation.

Question #2:

Why is America different from all other countries?

Answer:

In 1776, countries were based on nationality, religion, ethnicity, and geography. But, America was created on the basis of a set of ideas. That is still true today.

Question #3:

What are those ideas and what makes them so special?

Answer:

Three ideas summarize what America is all about. You can see them engraved on every American coin. They are "Liberty," "In God We Trust," and "E Pluribus Unum."

4. HOST PASSES AROUND AN AMERICAN COIN AND SELECTS READERS.

Reader #1:

"Liberty" means that we are free to pursue our dreams and to go as far in life as hard work and good fortune will take us.

Reader #2:

"In God We Trust" means that, in America, we believe that our rights and liberties have been granted to us by our Creator and therefore, they cannot be taken away by human beings.

Reader #3:

"E Pluribus Unum" is a Latin phrase that means "From Many, One." Unlike other countries, America has been composed of people of every religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, and national origin. Out of many people we become one people—Americans.

5. HOST SPEAKS:

We have gathered items to symbolize the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War that followed. That war won our freedom.

6. HOST HOLDS UP EACH SYMBOLIC ITEM AND EXPLAINS:

We drink sweet iced tea to remember the Boston Tea Party, when patriots dumped British tea into the ocean rather than pay unfair taxes to King George.

(all take a sip)

We eat a pretzel to remember the salty tears and suffering of the soldiers during the harsh winter at Valley Forge.

(all take a bite)

We ring a small bell to remember when the great Liberty Bell, now in Philadelphia, rang to proclaim the surrender of the King's armies.

(if you don't have a small bell, use your cell phone ringer)

We eat strawberries and blueberries dipped in whipped cream to celebrate our American pride, symbolized by the colors of the American flag.

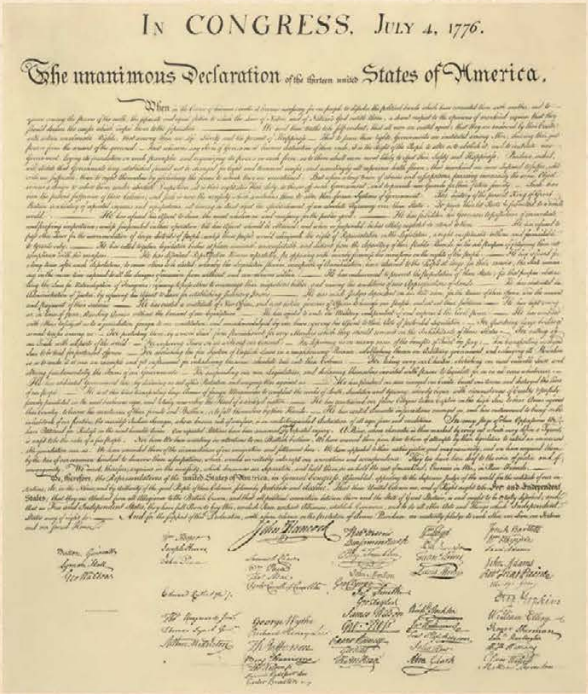
(any red, white, and blue goodies will do)

7. HOST SPEAKS:

We celebrate America's uniqueness, but we do not deny that America has always been imperfect. There are no perfect individuals, so there can hardly be a perfect country. Our national history has its share of shame. The greatest of these is the shame of slavery that existed at our founding, as it existed in every country in the world at that time. But let it never be forgotten that we fought a terrible Civil War in which hundreds of thousands of Americans died—and the reason for that war was to fight slavery. Let it also be remembered that America has fought in more wars for the freedom of others than any nation in the history of the world.

America's history is one that we can all be proud of—proud to remember, proud to celebrate, proud to carry into the future. So, let us now close with one more ritual: Signing our names to the Declaration of Independence. It may be a replica of the one our Founders signed, but the words and sentiments are eternal.

8. EVERYONE PRESENT SIGNS THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.


IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

9. HOST DISTRIBUTES THE WORDS TO "GOD BLESS AMERICA" TO GUESTS.

10. HOST SPEAKS:

Everyone, sing with me.

11. ALL SING:

God bless America,
land that I love

Stand beside her and guide her

Through the night
with the light from above

From the mountains
to the prairies

To the oceans white with foam

God bless America,
my home sweet home

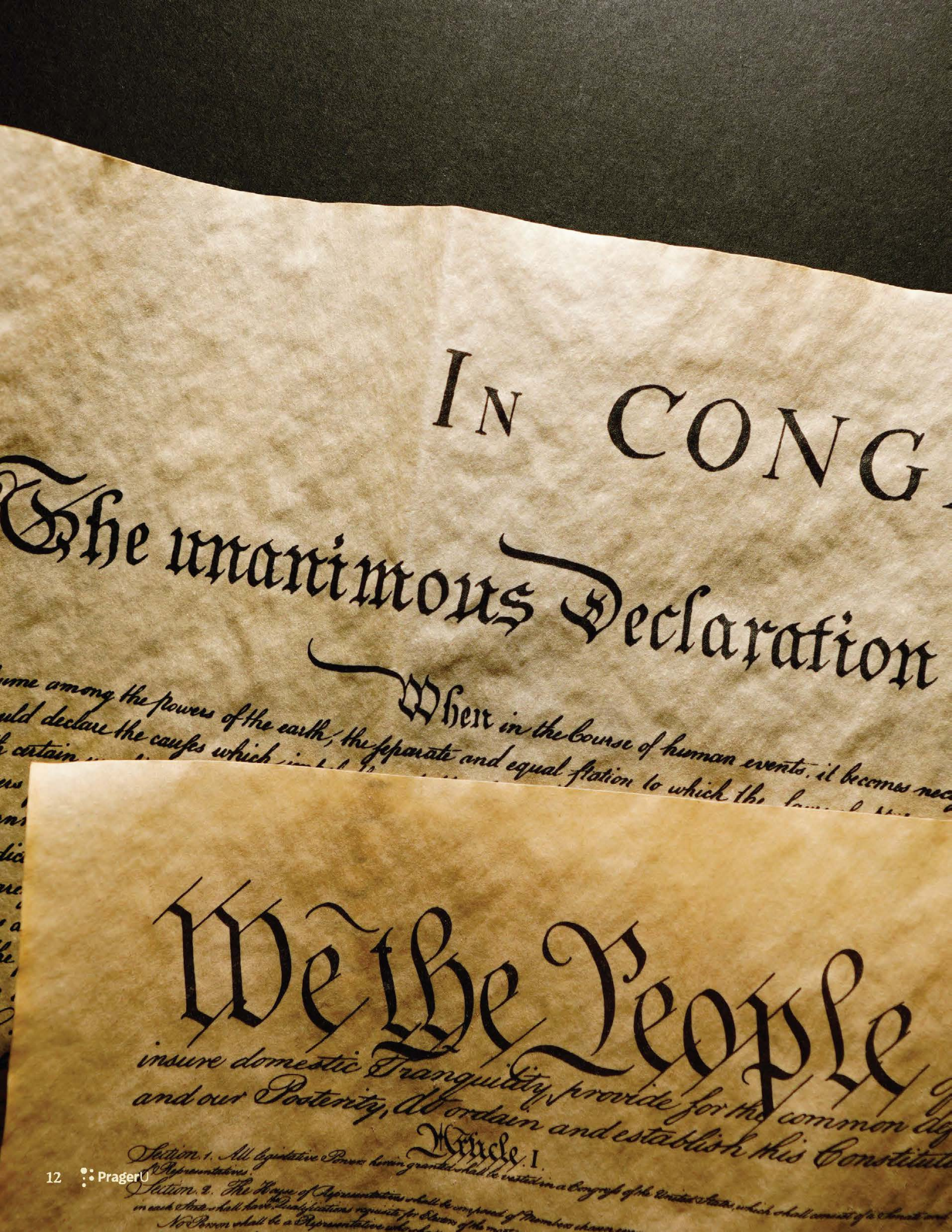
God bless America,
my home sweet home!

12. HOST CLOSES THE CEREMONY:

Happy Birthday, America.

Happy 4th of July.

Let's eat!


IN CONG
The unanimous Declaration
When in the course of human events, it becomes nec
We the People
insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common de
and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitu
Article. I.

Explore Our Founding Documents

The Declaration of Independence

Sign your name at the end!

p. 14–17

The Pledge of Allegiance

p. 18

The National Anthem

p. 19

The Declaration of Independence

In Congress, July 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are **Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.**–That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,–That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

*H*e has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

*H*e has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

*H*e has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

*H*e has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

*H*e has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

*H*e has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

*H*e has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

*H*e has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

*H*e has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

*H*e has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

*H*e has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

*H*e has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

*H*e has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

*F*or Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

*F*or protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

*F*or cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

*F*or imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

*F*or depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

*F*or transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

*F*or abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

*F*or taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

*F*or suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

*H*e has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

*H*e has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

*H*e is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

*H*e has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

*H*e has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our Brittish brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

Add your signatures below to commit to safeguarding the American values of Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. ——— We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. 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John Hancock

Button Gwinnett
Lyman Hall
Geo Walton

Wm Hooper
Joseph Hewes
John Penn

Edward Rutledge
Thos Heyward Junr
Thomas Lynch Junr
Arthur Middleton

Samuel Chase
Wm Paca
Thos Stone
Chas Carroll of Carrollton

George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee
Th Jefferson
Benj Harrison
Thos Nelson jr
Francis Lightfoot Lee
Carter Braxton

Robt Morris
Benjamin Rush
Benj Franklin
John Morton
Geo Clymer
Jas Smith
Geo Taylor
James Wilson
Geo Ross

Caesar Rodney
Geo Read
Tho M:Kean

Wm Floyd
Phil Livingston
Fras Lewis
Lewis Morris

Richd Stockton
Jno Witherspoon
Fras Hopkinson
John Hart
Abra Clark

Josiah Bartlett
Wm Whipple

Saml Adams
John Adams
Robt Treat Paine
Elbridge Gerry

Step Hopkins
William Ellery

Roger Sherman
Sam Huntington
Wm Williams
Oliver Wolcott

Matthew Thornton

The Pledge of Allegiance:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag
of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands,
one Nation under God, indivisible,
with liberty and justice for all

Schoolchildren in 1899 reciting the Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge was originally written in 1892 by Francis Bellamy.

It was modified several times with the most notable addition being the words "under God" in 1954 during the Cold War.

OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM

The Star-Spangled Banner

The United States national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," was written by Francis Scott Key in 1814. It consists of four stanzas, though typically only the first stanza is sung at public events.

Full Lyrics

written by Francis Scott Key

O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bomb bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream,
'Tis the star-spangled banner - O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a Country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footstep's pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand
Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation!
Blest with vict'ry and peace may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto - "In God is our trust,"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

The Founding of America

Pivotal events that preceded the beginning of the American Revolution

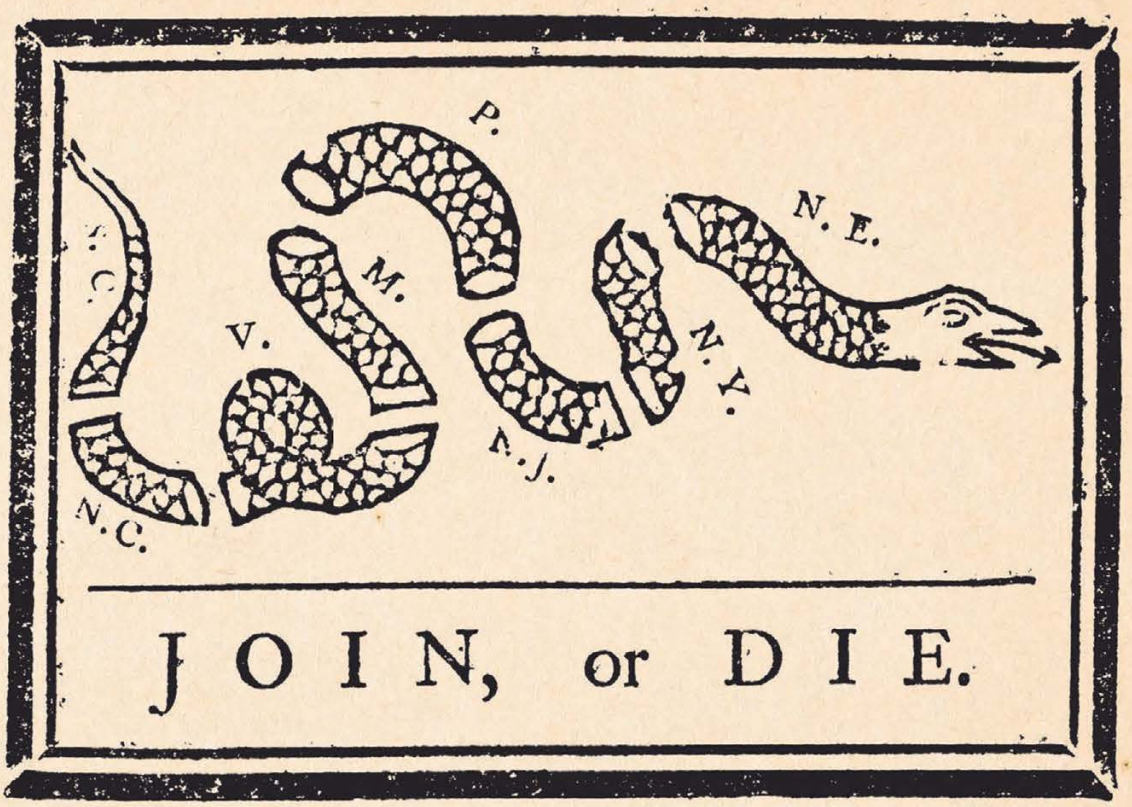
Join, or Die: America's First Meme ..... p. 21

The Story of Paul Revere ..... p. 22

The Boston Tea Party ..... p. 23

The Liberty Bell ..... p. 24

Join, or Die: America's First Meme



On May 9, 1754, Benjamin Franklin published a bold image in the Pennsylvania Gazette: a segmented snake labeled with the initials of eight colonies and the caption "JOIN, or DIE." It was the first political cartoon in an American newspaper. Initially the target of the cartoon was not the British Empire. Instead Franklin created it to urge colonial unity against the threat of French forces and their Native American allies during the French and Indian War.

Franklin's accompanying editorial warned that the colonies, if divided, would be defenseless. His solution was a proposal for a unified colonial government—a controversial idea he planned to advocate at the upcoming Albany Congress.

The cartoon's snake drew from folklore that a chopped snake could come back to life if rejoined before sunset. It also symbolized renewal and unity, as snakes were seen as creatures of regeneration. The segments—labeled N.E. (New England), N.Y., N.J., P. (Pennsylvania), M., V., N.C., and S.C.—roughly followed the geography of the eastern seaboard. Delaware and Georgia were excluded, possibly due to limited strategic value at the time.

The cartoon quickly spread to other newspapers. Franklin even sent it to England, hoping to influence British leaders. But the British saw colonial unity as a threat, and Parliament rejected his Albany Plan.

Though the image failed in its original goal, it gained new meaning years later. In the 1760s and 1770s, it was revived as a symbol of resistance to British rule, especially during protests over the Stamp Act. Paul Revere and other patriots reused the emblem to promote unity among the colonies.

What began as a call for defense against the French became a lasting symbol of American independence. Today, "Join, or Die" stands not only as a milestone in political cartooning, but as a powerful emblem of the revolutionary spirit that would soon transform the colonies into a nation.

What do you think inspired the colonies to unite?

The Story of Paul Revere

April 18, 1775. Boston stirs with unease. Under cover of night, British soldiers ready their boats. Patriots know: something is about to break.

Dr. Joseph Warren, sensing danger, dispatches Paul Revere. His orders: ride to Lexington. Warn John Hancock and Samuel Adams that British troops were on the move.

Intelligence suggested the Regulars aimed to arrest the patriot leaders—though history later showed this wasn't their mission. Their true target lay farther: Concord, where colonial militias had hidden arms, ammunition, and cannon.

Revere rides—not alone, not at random, but as part of a secret network of over thirty patriots, craftsmen-turned-intelligence operatives who met under oath in the Green Dragon Tavern. Their code? Two lanterns from the North Church if the British advance by water.

Revere's friends row him across the Charles River, slipping past the looming hull of the Somerset, a British man-of-war. On Charlestown's shore, a horse waits—Deacon Larkin's. By 11 PM, Revere is galloping through the night.

But he's not unopposed. British officers lie in wait. Revere narrowly escapes capture near Charlestown Neck and races through Medford, rousing the countryside: "The Regulars are coming!"

Joined by William Dawes and Dr. Samuel Prescott, Revere pushes toward Concord. But British patrols close in. Prescott escapes. Dawes is thrown. Revere is captured.

Though detained and interrogated, Revere's warnings have spread. The militia is ready.

At dawn, near Lexington's meetinghouse, the first shots ring out—muskets roar, and history is made. Revere, released without his horse, retrieves Hancock's trunk of papers as war breaks loose.

The Midnight Ride wasn't a solo dash into legend—it was a coordinated alarm, executed with resolve, ingenuity, and a network of patriots ready to risk everything for liberty.

What do you think gave Paul Revere the courage he had?

The Boston Tea Party

After Britain's costly victory in the French and Indian War, Parliament looked to the colonies to pay the debt. For Americans, the result was taxation without representation—a betrayal of their rights as Englishmen.

Boston became a lightning rod. The Townshend Acts. The Boston Massacre. The Tea Act of 1773 was the final insult. It lowered the cost of tea but cut colonial merchants out of the equation—and kept the tax. To patriots, it wasn't just commerce. It was control.

Protests erupted in every port. In most cities, the tea was sent back. But not in Boston. Governor Thomas Hutchinson refused to let the ships leave without unloading their cargo—and collecting the tax.

On the night of December 16, 1773, thousands gathered at the Old South Meeting House. When word came that Hutchinson would not relent, the crowd erupted. Dozens of men—many of them Sons of Liberty—disguised in Mohawk garb, marched to Griffin's Wharf. In disciplined silence, they boarded the Dartmouth, Eleanor, and Beaver.

What followed was no riot. It was a deliberate act of resistance. 342 chests of East India Company tea were split open with axes and dumped into Boston Harbor—over 90,000 pounds, worth nearly $1 million today. Not a single person was harmed. Not a crate stolen. A broken padlock was replaced the next day.

Parliament responded with the Coercive Acts. But it was too late. The colonies had found unity. And revolution was brewing.

What made the Boston Tea Party more significant than a mere protest against taxes?

The Liberty Bell

It weighs over 2,000 pounds and hasn't rung in nearly two centuries—yet its call for freedom still echoes through American history.

Cast in 1753 by Philadelphia metalworkers John Pass and John Stow, the Liberty Bell began as a working bell for the Pennsylvania State House—what we now call Independence Hall. Its inscription, taken from Leviticus 25:10, read: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof." At first, it summoned lawmakers and townspeople—not yet a symbol, just sound.

But time transformed it. A crack developed in the early 1840s after nearly 90 years of use. A repair attempt in 1846 failed, and a second fissure silenced the bell forever. Yet from that silence emerged a national symbol.

Abolitionists in the 1830s were the first to call it the "Liberty Bell," seeing in its inscription a divine call to end slavery. The bell traveled the country after the Civil War, uniting Americans in a shared memory of liberty. Later, women's suffrage leaders embraced it. Civil Rights advocates followed.

Today, the Liberty Bell stands cracked but unbroken. Though it never rang on July 4, its presence has rung across centuries of struggle and hope.

Its call for liberty—proclaimed in bronze—still resounds, louder than any bell ever could.

What do you think is the meaning behind having a biblical verse on the Liberty Bell?

Key Events of the Revolutionary War

Why the Colonists Fought

The Road to the American Revolution

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Key Battles & Events

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Why the Colonists Fought

The Road to the American Revolution

The American Revolution wasn't sparked by a single event. It was the result of more than a decade of rising tension, fueled by economic pressure, political exclusion, and growing resentment against British rule. At its core, it was a struggle over liberty, representation, and who had the right to govern the people of America.

For much of the 17th and early 18th centuries, the British government followed a policy of "salutary neglect"—allowing its colonies to manage most of their own affairs. Local legislatures levied taxes and passed laws, while colonists grew accustomed to governing themselves. But that changed after Britain's expensive victory in the French and Indian War (1754–1763). To pay off massive war debts, Parliament turned to the colonies—and began to assert greater control.

First came the Stamp Act in 1765, taxing newspapers, legal documents, and even playing cards. Then the Townshend Acts taxed everyday goods like glass and paint. The colonists objected not to taxes themselves—but to "taxation without representation". They had no elected voice in Parliament. To them, this was a violation of their basic rights as Englishmen.

Resistance spread. British troops were sent to enforce order, but that only raised tensions. In 1770, violence exploded in the streets of Boston. British soldiers fired into a crowd, killing five colonists. The Boston Massacre, as it came to be known, became a powerful symbol of British tyranny—especially when Paul Revere's engraving depicted the colonists as helpless victims.

The conflict deepened in 1773 with the Tea Act, which gave the British East India Company a monopoly on tea in the colonies. Colonists saw it as a trick—a way to make them accept Parliament's right to tax them. In protest, patriots disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded British ships and dumped over 92,000 pounds of tea into Boston Harbor. The Boston Tea Party was an act of defiance. Parliament responded with the Coercive Acts—closing Boston's port and placing the city under martial law.

Meanwhile, the colonists were developing a new identity—not just as Englishmen in America, but as Americans. Voices like Thomas Paine, in his pamphlet Common Sense, called for full independence, arguing that a distant and corrupt monarchy had no right to govern free men an ocean away.

The first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord in April 1775. British troops marching to confiscate colonial weapons were met by local militia—the Minutemen—and gunfire erupted. That day, the world changed. What had been a political dispute became a war for freedom.

The American colonists weren't just fighting the British. After 1778, they were joined by France, Spain, and the Netherlands in a global war that would span continents and seas. Still, the American cause remained clear: to secure self-government, economic freedom, and the right to live by laws they consented to.

The colonists fought not because they hated Britain—but because they believed liberty was worth the risk of war. That belief gave birth to a new nation.

Lexington and Concord

The Shot Heard 'Round the World

Before sunrise on April 19, 1775, 700 British Redcoats marched out of Boston, ordered to seize weapons in Concord and crush rebellion before it began. But the countryside was already awake.

Thanks to a secret network of riders—Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Samuel Prescott—the alarm had spread through the Massachusetts countryside. Church bells rang. Muskets were loaded. Minute Men, colonial volunteers trained to respond to threats "at a minute's notice," assembled alongside local militias.

At Lexington Green, 77 of them—led by Captain John Parker—stood their ground. Suddenly, a single shot cracked through the morning air.

No one knows who fired first. But the British unleashed with a brutal volley. Eight colonists died.

The Redcoats pressed on to Concord, but by now hundreds of Minute Men had arrived. At the North Bridge, they spotted smoke rising from town and feared the worst. Among them was Major John Buttrick, a Concord farmer and veteran of the French and Indian War. As British soldiers opened fire, Buttrick gave the order: "For God's sake, fire!"

His men obeyed. Three British soldiers fell. The retreat to Boston became a running battle—ambushed mile after mile by farmers, blacksmiths, and tradesmen turned soldiers. Parker's Lexington men returned fire with vengeance.

By day's end, the British had suffered nearly 300 casualties. The colonists: fewer than 100.

The Revolution had begun—with courage, defiance, and the shot heard 'round the world.

In what way is America unique today due to the vision of the colonists?

Bunker Hill

The First Stand for Freedom

On June 17, 1775, smoke curled above Boston Harbor as British ships landed thousands of Redcoats at the base of Breed's Hill. Their orders were clear: crush the colonial uprising before it spread. But the "mob" waiting atop the hill did not back down.

Just two months after Lexington and Concord, British General Thomas Gage aimed to seize the high ground surrounding Boston. Colonial spies got wind of his plan. Overnight, around 1,000 patriots—farmers, merchants, and tradesmen—dug defensive trenches atop Breed's Hill. Among them were both free and enslaved Black soldiers. One of them, a man known as Salem, was later credited with killing Major John Pitcairn, the British officer despised for his role at Lexington.

As British forces advanced in tight formation, American Colonel William Prescott reportedly ordered, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes." When the volley finally came, it devastated the British line. They retreated, regrouped, and charged again—only to be thrown back once more.

On their third attempt, the patriots' ammunition ran out. The British broke through the redoubt. Fierce hand-to-hand combat followed. The Redcoats took the hill—but at staggering cost: over 1,000 casualties, including nearly 230 dead.

A stunned British officer confessed, "We expected to punish a mob, not fight men who would look us in the face."

Though technically a British victory, the battle steeled the American cause. Within weeks, George Washington took command of the militia outside Boston. At Bunker Hill, the patriots had shown the world—they would not go quietly.

Why do you think people still study about Bunker Hill over 250 years later?

The Battle of Trenton

Washington's Bold Gamble

On Christmas night, 1776, as sleet and snow battered the Delaware River, General George Washington made a desperate gamble. Morale in the Continental Army was near collapse—his troops were exhausted, freezing, and outnumbered. Enlistments were set to expire. But Washington saw one last chance to strike back.

He led 2,400 soldiers across the ice-choked river under cover of darkness. Their destination: Trenton, New Jersey, where 1,500 Hessian mercenaries—German troops hired by the British—were encamped. The weather delayed them, and the army arrived after daybreak on December 26. But Washington still had the element of surprise.

He divided his forces. Major General Nathanael Greene attacked from the north. General John Sullivan struck from the west, cutting off any southern retreat. Washington personally rode into the center. As artillery opened fire, Hessian drums beat frantically, rallying the troops.

But it was too late. Colonel Johann Rall, the Hessian commander, tried to mount a defense but was mortally wounded. His regiments—disoriented, leaderless—retreated to an orchard, where they surrendered.

In less than an hour, the Americans captured nearly 900 Hessians, along with desperately needed supplies—muskets, food, clothing, and cannon. American casualties? Just five wounded.

Washington's army recrossed the river to safety, exhausted but triumphant. The victory at Trenton turned the tide. It proved the American cause still had fight—and a leader bold enough to defy the odds.

What began as a retreat across New Jersey ended in triumph—and revived a revolution many believed was lost.

Why did the Battle of Trenton revive the Revolution?

The Battle of Saratoga

Turning Point of the Revolution

In the fall of 1777, the British Empire launched a grand strategy to split the rebellious colonies in two. General John Burgoyne marched south from Canada with 7,500 troops, aiming to seize the Hudson River Valley and sever New England from the rest of the colonies. But what began as a confident invasion ended in disaster—and changed the course of the war.

After early victories at Fort Ticonderoga and Hubbardton, Burgoyne's forces moved slowly through the wilderness, losing men and supplies. When his detachment was crushed at the Battle of Bennington, his weakened army pressed south toward Saratoga.

Waiting for him at Bemis Heights was American General Horatio Gates, with 8,500 troops fortified along the bluffs. Among them was Colonel Daniel Morgan's riflemen—and a fiery, ambitious commander named Benedict Arnold.

On September 19, the armies clashed at Freeman's Farm. The British technically held the field, but their losses were steep. Hoping for reinforcements from New York that never came, Burgoyne dug in.

On October 7, he attacked again. But the Americans, now 13,000 strong, repelled the assault. Arnold, rallying troops on horseback, led a decisive charge that captured the Breymann Redoubt. He was wounded, but the British lines collapsed.

Burgoyne tried to retreat, but rain and exhaustion stopped him. On October 17, 1777, he surrendered his entire army—over 6,000 men.

The victory at Saratoga stunned the world. France formally allied with the United States, followed later by Spain and the Dutch. The Revolution was no longer just an American fight—it was a global war for liberty.

How did the Battle of Saratoga impact the Revolutionary War?

Valley Forge

Birthplace of the American Army

In December 1777, General George Washington led 12,000 weary but determined Continental soldiers into winter quarters at Valley Forge, 18 miles outside British-occupied Philadelphia. Contrary to myth, they were not helpless victims of winter. But they were underfed, underclothed, and under constant strain.

For six months, Washington's men battled not the British—but exposure, hunger, and disease. Nearly 2,000 would die, most from illness. Yet this crucible forged something stronger than iron: a professional army.

The men built over 1,500 log huts and two miles of trenches, transforming Valley Forge into the fourth largest city in America at the time. Officers organized construction teams. Soldiers scavenged, foraged, and stood guard—some barefoot in snow. Free and enslaved African Americans, Native allies, European immigrants, women, and children all lived and labored in the camp.

The turning point came with the arrival of Baron von Steuben, a former Prussian officer. Speaking little English, he drilled the army with fierce precision, teaching tactics, sanitation, and discipline. He explained why soldiers must act as a unit—and the Americans responded. By spring, they moved with unity and purpose.

Washington's leadership held the army together, even as political rivals plotted to replace him. His authority only grew stronger. And when word of the French alliance arrived in May, the camp erupted in celebration.

On June 19, 1778, Washington's army marched out of Valley Forge as a hardened fighting force tested by the elements and renewed in their purpose of liberation.

What is most surprising about the Battle at Valley Forge?

The Battle of Yorktown

The Revolution's Decisive End

By the fall of 1781, after six years of brutal war, both the British and Continental armies were exhausted. General Charles Cornwallis moved his 9,000 troops into Yorktown, Virginia, hoping for resupply by sea. But General George Washington saw an opportunity to end the war.

Washington, urged by French General Rochambeau and supported by Admiral de Grasse's fleet, shifted his focus south. In the largest troop movement of the war, 8,000 American and French soldiers marched over 400 miles to Virginia, joining 12,000 allied forces already in position. At sea, French warships repelled the British at the Battle of the Capes, cutting off Cornwallis's escape.

On September 28, the siege began.

Washington's and Rochambeau's men dug trenches around Yorktown, bringing heavy artillery within striking distance. On October 9, Washington fired the first American cannon. For days, allied guns pounded British defenses without pause.

On October 14, in a daring nighttime assault, French and American troops captured key British redoubts. Alexander Hamilton led the charge on Redoubt 10, while the French stormed Redoubt 9. With enemy guns now positioned even closer, Cornwallis's position collapsed.

On October 17, the British called for surrender. Two days later, Cornwallis's army marched out under truce. Over 7,000 troops laid down their arms.

The British played the tune "The World Turned Upside Down." And it had.

When news of the defeat reached London, Prime Minister Lord North gasped, "It is all over." The American Revolution had reached its turning point—and its triumph.

How do you think the king felt after the battle of Yorktown? Can you imagine his reaction?

The End of the War

The Treaty of Paris, 1783

On October 19, 1781, British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered 7,000 troops at Yorktown. The news struck London like a thunderbolt. Prime Minister Lord North clutched his chest and cried, "Oh God, it is all over!" It was. Britain lacked the will—and the resources—to continue the war.

But peace would not come swiftly.

Initial negotiations were tense. Lord North's rejected "Conciliation Plan" tried to lure the colonies back with promises of leniency—but it was too late. The Americans weren't asking for favors. They were demanding independence.

After North's resignation, new leadership in Britain was more willing to negotiate. American envoys—Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay—refused a French proposal to divide North America and negotiated directly with Britain. Under the guidance of Lord Shelburne, Britain agreed to terms that shocked Europe.

On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed. Britain formally recognized the United States of America as a sovereign nation. The new nation gained all land east of the Mississippi, north of Florida, and south of Canada, plus fishing rights off Newfoundland. Loyalist property rights and prisoner releases were addressed, and both sides pledged perpetual peace.

The treaty gave the young republic room to grow—and a place on the world stage.

It took eight years, countless sacrifices, and improbable victories. But in Paris, American independence was no longer a dream. It was the law of nations.

The war had ended. A nation had begun.

Imagine being a child in 1783. How would you celebrate the end of the war and the birth of your new nation?

The Signers of the Declaration of Independence

Overview

Who the signers were, what they risked, and why it mattered.

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Signers by State

Explore extended biographies of each signer.
Scan the QR codes to video profiles and White House exhibit photos.

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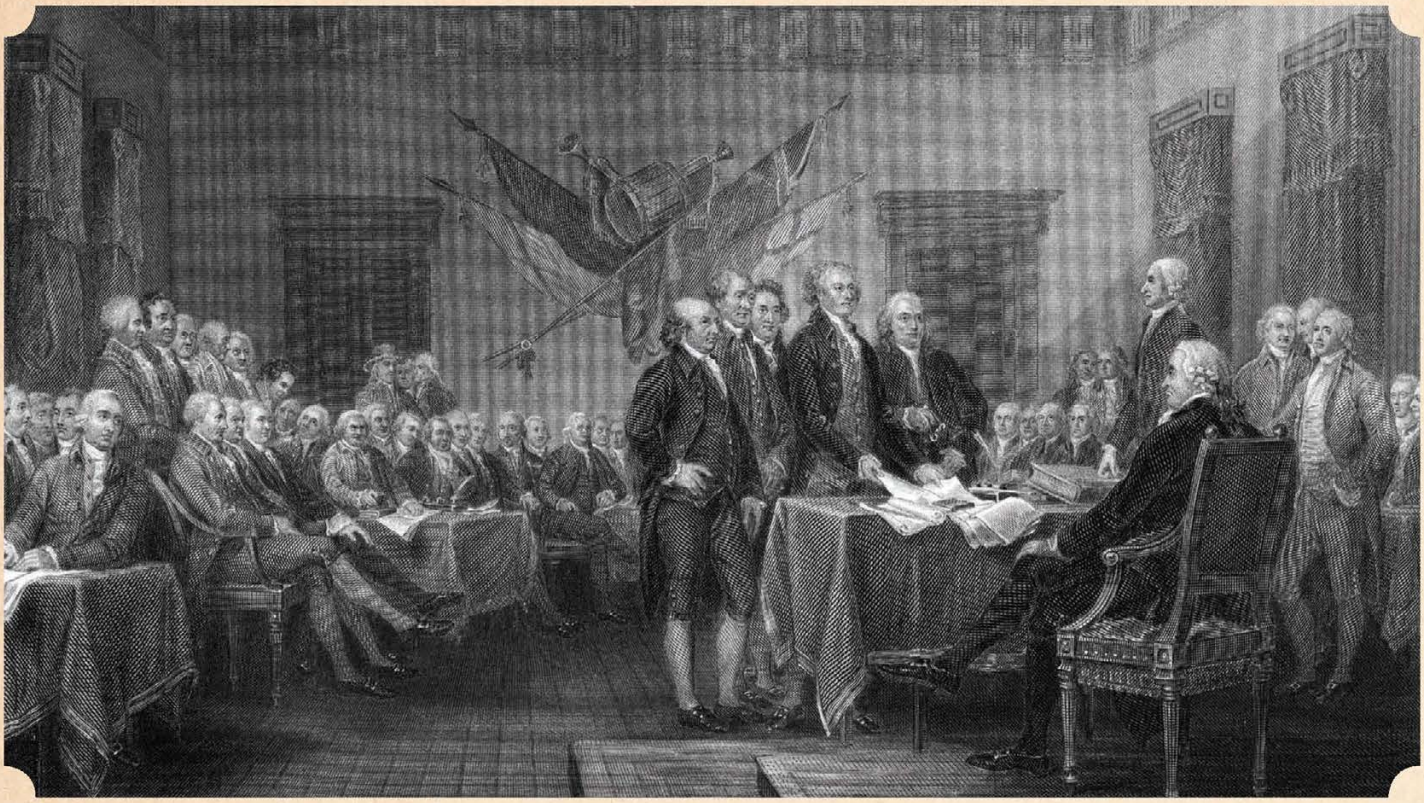
Who Were the Signers?



In the summer of 1776, fifty-six brave men gathered in Philadelphia to commit what the British Crown considered treason. These were not reckless radicals—they were farmers, merchants, lawyers, physicians, ministers, and scholars. They came from different backgrounds and thirteen separate colonies, yet they shared one powerful conviction: that all people are created equal and endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Together, these men became the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Their decision to stand against the most powerful empire in the world was not made lightly. Many were wealthy and well-established; they had much to lose. By signing their names to the Declaration, they risked their reputations, their fortunes, and their very lives. If the Revolution failed, they would be hanged as traitors. But they chose principle over comfort, courage over compromise.

They came together in unity, representing the diverse voices of a new American identity. Though they differed in age, religion, and regional interests, they agreed on a single, earth-shaking idea: that government exists to serve the people, not to rule over them without their consent. Their signatures on the Declaration marked the birth of a nation founded not on bloodlines or monarchs, but on liberty and self-governance.

Their act of defiance ignited a revolution. Their words reshaped the world. And their sacrifices laid the foundation for the freedoms Americans cherish today.

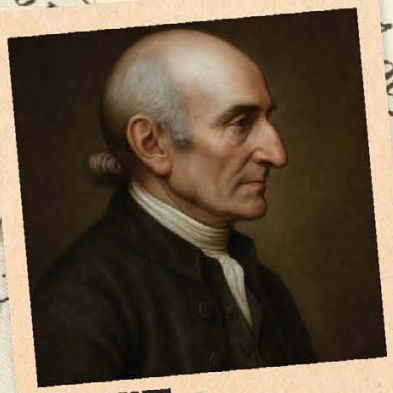
The signers of the Declaration of Independence were not merely figures of the past—they were visionaries of the future. Patriots. Founders. Americans.

Signers by State

VIRGINIA

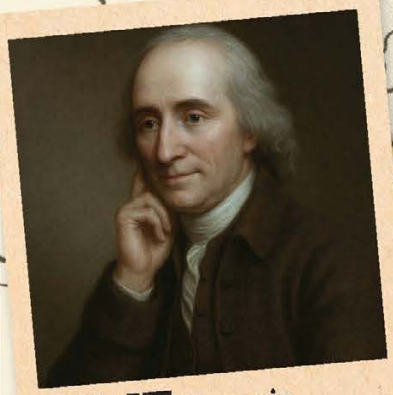
Scan the QR codes to video profiles and White House exhibit photos.
Explore the biography of each signer in more detail in the following pages.

Thomas Jefferson
1743–1826



George Wythe
1726–1806

Richard Henry Lee
1732–1794

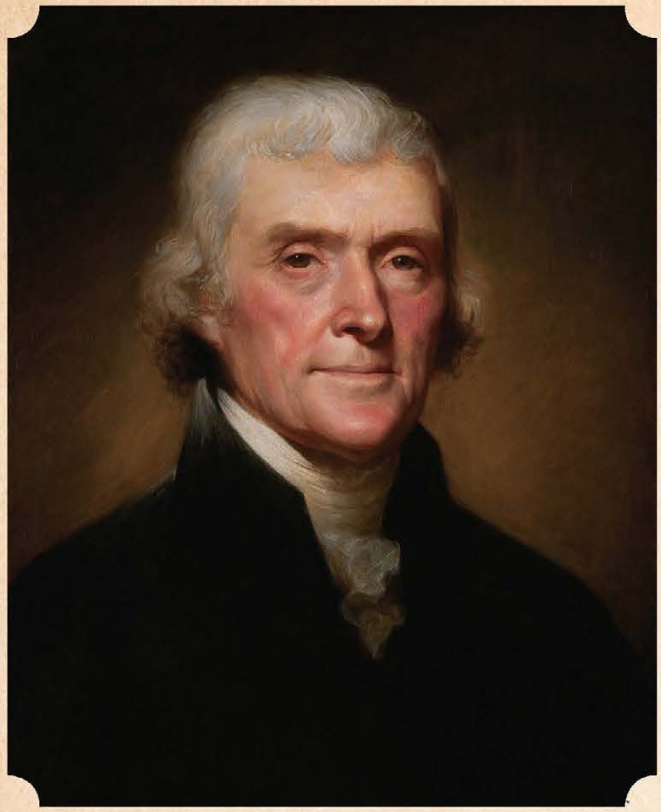


Francis Lightfoot Lee
1734–1797

Carter Braxton
1736–1797

Thomas Nelson Jr.
1738–1789

Benjamin Harrison
1726–1791



Thomas Jefferson

1743–1826

VIRGINIA

Born on April 13, 1743, near present-day Charlottesville, Virginia, Thomas Jefferson was the primary drafter of the Declaration of Independence and the third President of the United States. The son of Peter Jefferson, a farmer and surveyor, and Jane Randolph, who hailed from a prominent Virginia family, Jefferson was educated by private tutors.

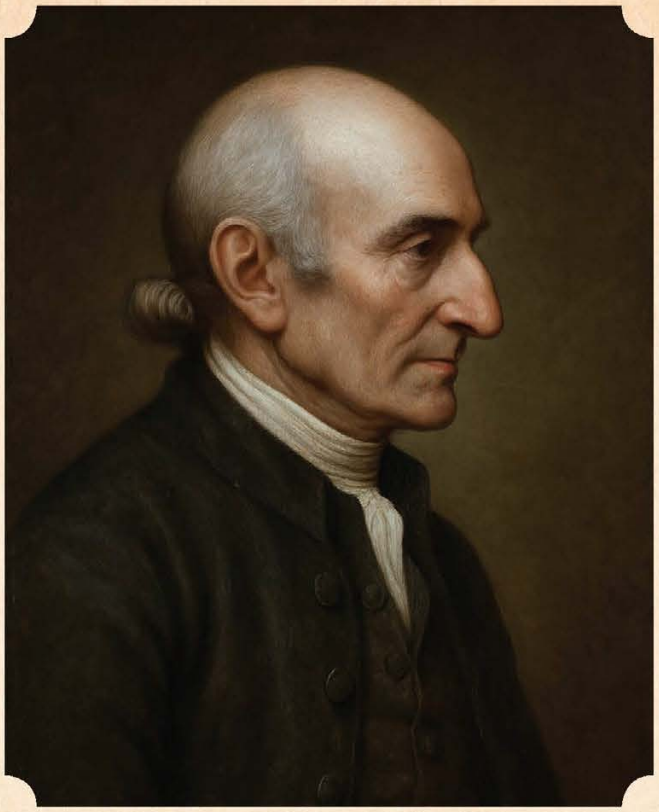
He later attended the College of William and Mary, where he studied mathematics, philosophy, law, and languages. A man of the Enlightenment, he inherited a large estate from his father and designed his lifelong residence, Monticello.

At 26, Jefferson entered the Virginia House of Burgesses, where his eloquence earned him a seat in the Second Continental Congress. At 33, he agreed to draft the Declaration of Independence upon John Adams's insistence that Jefferson was more eloquent and well-liked than him. He penned the words that inspired thousands of young men to give their lives for the ideals that still ring true in the heart of every American: "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Following a term as Governor of Virginia, Jefferson became Minister to France, strengthening ties with America's key wartime ally. Under George Washington, he served as the first Secretary of State. In 1796, Jefferson was elected vice president under John Adams, and in 1800, he defeated Adams in a fiercely contested election. As president, Jefferson orchestrated the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the nation's size, and pursued neutrality during the Napoleonic Wars.

After two terms, he retired to Monticello, where he corresponded with former rival John Adams. Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. According to one account, just before he died, he asked his physician, "Is it the Fourth?"

Scan to watch our video about Thomas Jefferson



George Wythe

George Wythe

1726–1806

VIRGINIA

George Wythe was a lawyer, judge, professor, and influential Founding Father whose contributions shaped the legal and political foundations of the United States.

Born in 1726 in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, Wythe attended the College of William and Mary and studied law in his uncle's office. His legal talent earned him a strong reputation, and in 1748, he was appointed clerk to two House of Burgesses committees. In 1754, he became acting Attorney General of Virginia—the youngest to hold the position.

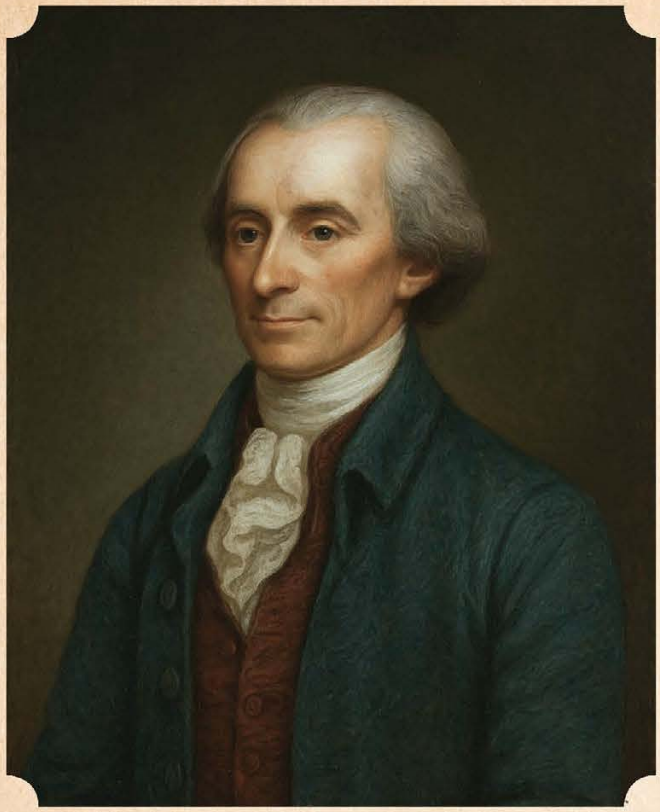
In 1758, Wythe became William and Mary's representative to the House of Burgesses, mentoring students like Thomas Jefferson, with whom he discussed literature, science, architecture, and politics.

As tensions rose with Britain, Wythe became an advocate for independence and earned a seat in the Second Continental Congress. Though he returned to Virginia before the Declaration of Independence was finalized—to help draft the state constitution and design the state seal—his colleagues left room for his signature. He added it upon his return in September 1776.

Wythe later served as Speaker of the House of Delegates, a member of the Virginia Convention, and one of three judges on the High Court of Chancery. He was also named the first professor of law at William and Mary, making him the first law professor at any American institution. His students included James Monroe and John Marshall.

Wythe later moved to Richmond, where he spent time studying ancient Hebrew and conducting electrical experiments. He died in 1806, allegedly poisoned by his grandnephew.

Scan to watch our video about George Wythe



Richard Henry Lee

Richard Henry Lee

1732–1794
VIRGINIA

Richard Henry Lee, born on January 20, 1732, at Stratford Hall in Virginia, played an indispensable role for American independence. Over a long public life, he served in the Virginia House of Burgesses, as president of the Continental Congress, a U.S. senator from Virginia, and as one of the first to hold the title of president pro tempore of the Senate.

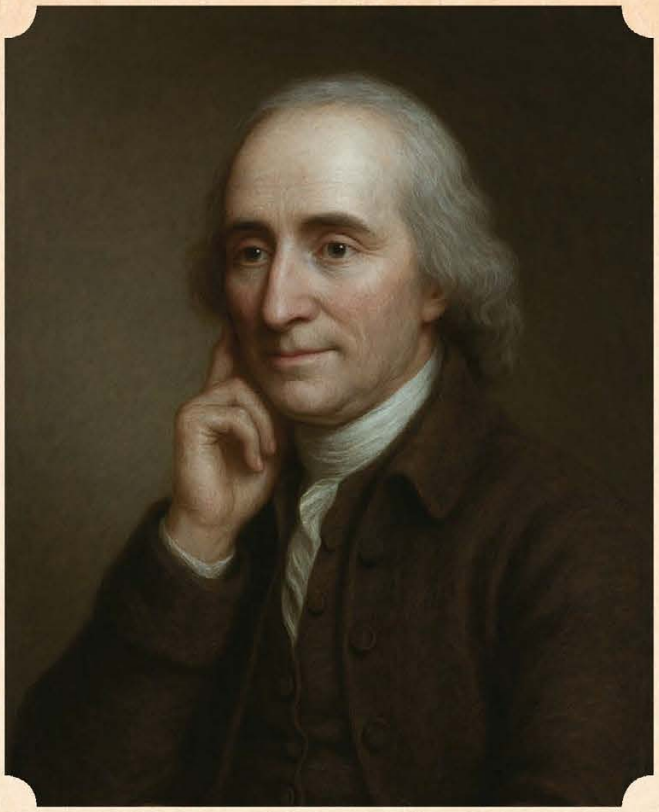
Lee was educated at home before being sent to England at age 16 for formal schooling. He returned to Virginia in 1753 and soon entered public life, serving as a justice of the peace and later as a member of the House of Burgesses. Alongside figures like Patrick Henry, Lee became one of the earliest advocates for American independence, speaking out against British taxation policies.

As a delegate to the Continental Congress, Lee introduced the Lee Resolution, declaring that "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States..." The resolution's passage marked the formal break from British rule and set the stage for the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Lee remained active in national leadership after the war. From 1784 to 1785, he served as president of the Congress under the Articles of Confederation. In 1789, he was elected one of Virginia's first U.S. senators and briefly held the position of president pro tempore. He resigned in 1792 due to declining health.

Richard Henry Lee died on June 19, 1794, at the age of 62, at his estate in Chantilly, Virginia.

Scan to watch our video about Richard Henry Lee



Francis Lightfoot Lee

Francis Lightfoot Lee

1734–1797
VIRGINIA

Francis Lightfoot Lee was born on October 14, 1734, at Stratford Hall Plantation, Virginia, into the prominent Lee family, a political dynasty with roots in America dating back to the 1630s.

Raised on his father's tobacco plantation, Lee was privately educated by tutors but did not attend college. As a young man, he focused on managing family landholdings, but by the late 1750s, he turned to politics. He was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he opposed British policies such as the Stamp Act and spoke out for colonial rights.

His dedication to the Patriot cause led to his election to both the First and Second Continental Congresses, where he served alongside his brother, Richard Henry Lee. Though equally committed to independence, the two brothers differed in style: Richard was known for his public speaking, while Francis was quieter and led through action rather than oratory.

In 1776, Francis Lightfoot Lee signed the Declaration of Independence. He also helped draft the Articles of Confederation and briefly served in the Virginia State Senate.

Following his public service, Lee retired to his estate, Menokin, where he lived a quieter life. He died on January 11, 1797, at age 62, just days after the death of his wife, Rebecca. The couple had no children.

Scan to watch our video about Francis Lightfoot Lee

Benjamin Harrison

1726–1791

VIRGINIA

Benjamin Harrison V was born on April 5, 1726, at Berkeley Plantation in Virginia. His father, Benjamin Harrison IV, held public office as both the Sheriff of Charles City County and a member of the House of Burgesses.

Harrison attended William and Mary College, where he met future revolutionaries like Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson, but he soon had to leave school after his father and a sister were killed by a lightning strike. He returned home to manage the family's 1,000-acre estate, including shipbuilding and horse breeding.

In 1748, Harrison married Elizabeth Bassett, niece of Martha Washington. They had eight children, including William Henry Harrison, who became the 9th president in 1841, and his great-grandson Benjamin Harrison, who became the 23rd president in 1889.

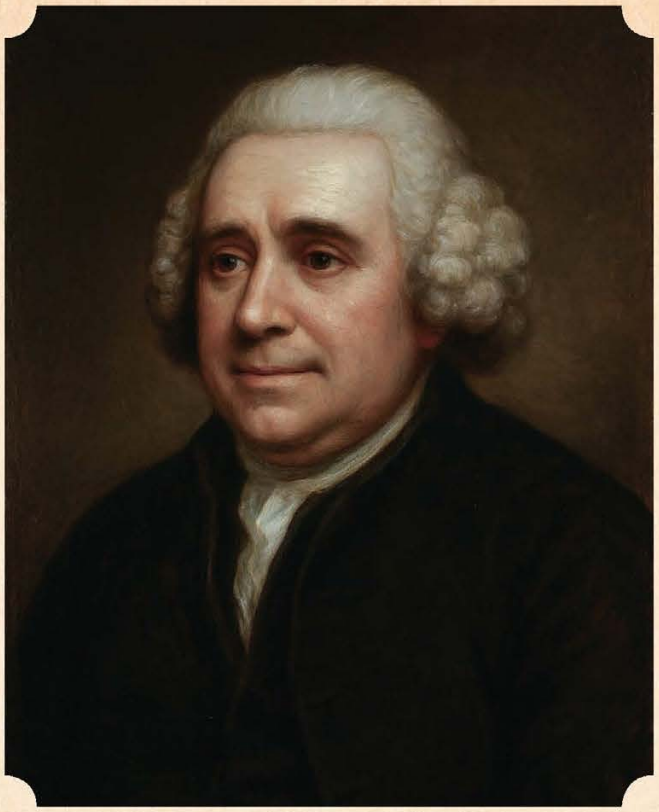
Harrison entered politics in 1749 as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he began opposing British rule in the 1760s. When the House passed resolutions condemning the Stamp Act, the Royal Governor tried to sway Harrison with an executive council appointment, but Harrison declined.

After the House was dissolved in 1774, Harrison was elected to the Continental Congress, and in 1776, he signed the Declaration of Independence. He returned to Virginia politics in 1777 and served as a militia lieutenant.

In 1778, Harrison was elected Speaker of the Virginia House, and in 1781, became Governor of Virginia, serving three terms. In 1788, he took part in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, advocating for protections that would later form the Bill of Rights.

Harrison returned to private life and died in Virginia on April 24, 1791, at age 65.

Scan to watch our video about Benjamin Harrison



Carter Braxton

Carter Braxton

1736–1797
VIRGINIA

Carter Braxton was a wealthy landowner, businessman, and financier of the American Revolution. Born on September 10, 1736, at Newington Plantation in Virginia, Braxton graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1755.

At 19, he married into another influential family, further elevating his social standing. Tragedy struck when his wife died after two years, leaving him with two daughters. To recover, he spent time in England, where he became familiar with British politics and its colonial policies.

After remarrying, Braxton resumed life as a planter and businessman in Virginia. As tensions with Britain escalated, he joined the Virginia House of Burgesses and in 1776 was appointed as a delegate to the Continental Congress. Though initially reluctant, he came to support independence and signed the Declaration of Independence, risking his wealth and status in the process.

Braxton invested heavily in the Patriot cause, funding the Continental Navy and military efforts. Many of his ships and ventures were lost to British blockades and wartime destruction. Once one of Virginia's wealthiest men, he took on tremendous debt due to his commitment to the cause.

After the war, Braxton continued to serve in the Virginia state government. He died on October 10, 1797, at the age of 61, having sacrificed much of his fortune in support of American freedom.

Scan to watch our video about Carter Braxton

Thomas Nelson Jr.

Th: Nelson Jr.

1738–1789

VIRGINIA

Founding Father Thomas Nelson Jr. was born in 1738 in Yorktown to one of Virginia's First Families. He grew up in all the trappings of wealth and prepared for taking his eventual place as a top businessman and leader.

In 1761, Nelson entered public service, elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. When the patriots issued a resolution excoriating British Parliament's "Boston Port Bill," Nelson sided with the colonists against the Royal Governor, who dissolved the assembly. This event set in motion the cause for independence.

Nelson was elected to the Virginia Convention of 1774 and 1775, and in the latter nudged the members toward action—proposing organizing a militia in the Commonwealth.

Between 1775 and 1777, Nelson served in the Continental Congress, proudly supporting the cause of Independence.

In 1781, Nelson was elected to replace Thomas Jefferson as Governor. To repel the British invasion, the legislature granted him robust powers to effectively defend Virginia. As Brigadier General, he raised volunteer troops. He led militia forces. Alongside Washington and Rochambeau, he besieged the British in his hometown, Yorktown.

According to family tradition, Nelson told Washington to aim fire on his home when he heard it was occupied by the British.

Nelson was among the signers of the Declaration to make good on his pledge to give his fortune to the cause of independence. He died poor in 1789, leaving behind his wife and 11 children.

Scan to watch our video about Thomas Nelson Jr.

Signers by State

MASSACHUSETTS

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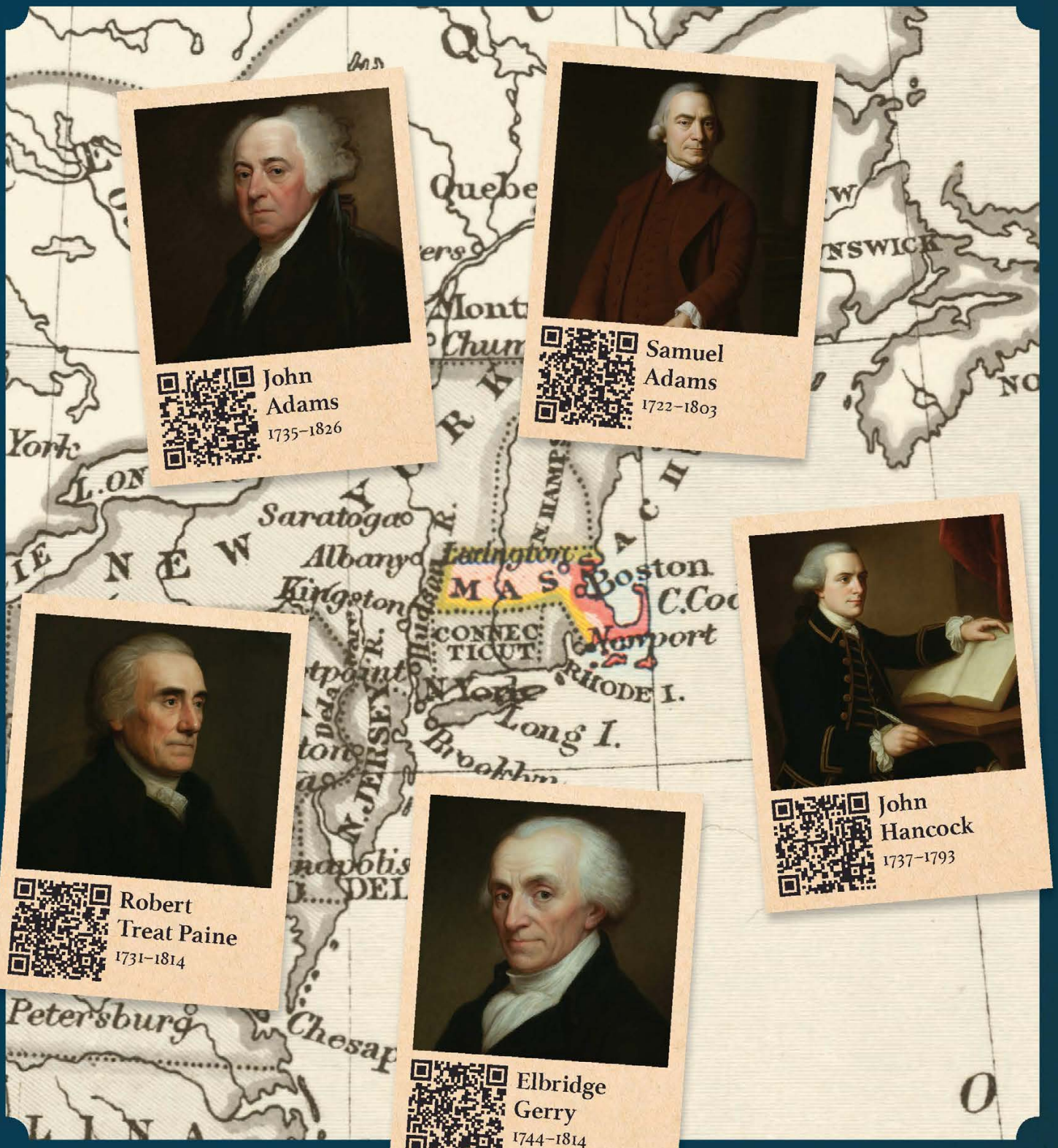
Explore the biography of each signer in more detail in the following pages.



John Adams

John Adams

1735–1826

MASSACHUSETTS

John Adams was a lawyer, statesman, and political theorist whose writings and intellect were vital to American independence.

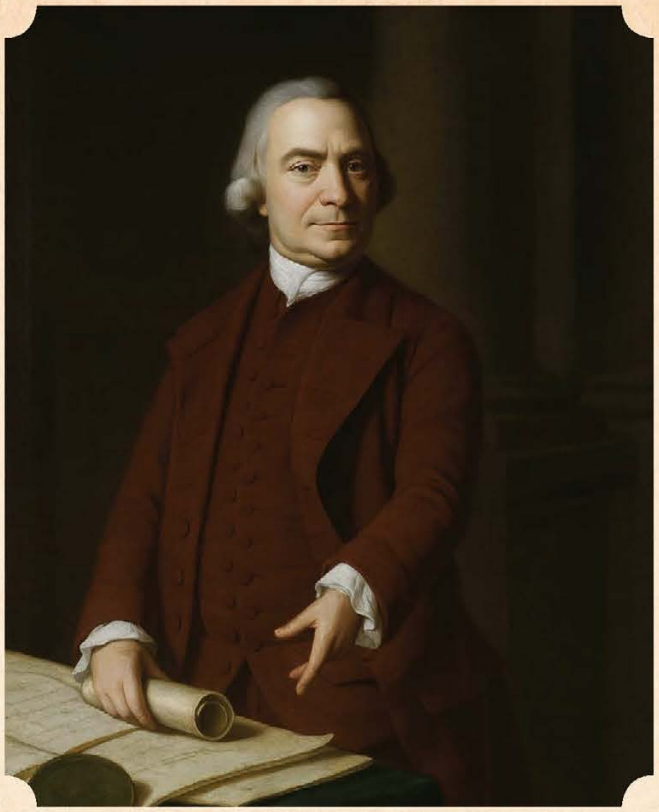
Born on October 30, 1735, in Braintree, Massachusetts, Adams attended Braintree Latin School and entered Harvard College at 16, later studying law and opening a practice in 1758. In 1764, he married Abigail Smith, with whom he had six children.

Though initially hesitant to enter politics, the Stamp Act of 1765 spurred Adams to write essays supporting the Patriot cause and he became one of the most prominent voices for independence. Despite his fierce opposition to British rule, he defended the British soldiers in the Boston Massacre, believing that no one should be denied the right to a fair trial.

In 1774, Adams was selected as one of Massachusetts' delegates to the First Continental Congress. He returned the following year for the Second Continental Congress, where he helped draft the Declaration of Independence. Adams wrote Abigail, "The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha in the History of America." In 1789, Adams became the first vice president, serving under George Washington. He was inaugurated as president on March 4, 1797. He avoided war with France and preserved national unity during a volatile period. He was the first president to live in the White House, leaving office in 1801.

In later years, Adams renewed his friendship with his political rival, Thomas Jefferson. On July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the Declaration, Adams died at age 90, reportedly saying, "Jefferson still survives." Unbeknownst to him, Jefferson had died hours earlier that same day.

Scan to watch our video about John Adams



Samuel Adams

Sam'l Adams

1722–1803

MASSACHUSETTS

Samuel Adams, born on September 27, 1722, in Boston, Massachusetts, was a passionate and influential voice against British rule before and during the American Revolution. A second cousin of President John Adams, he played a major role in advancing the cause of independence.

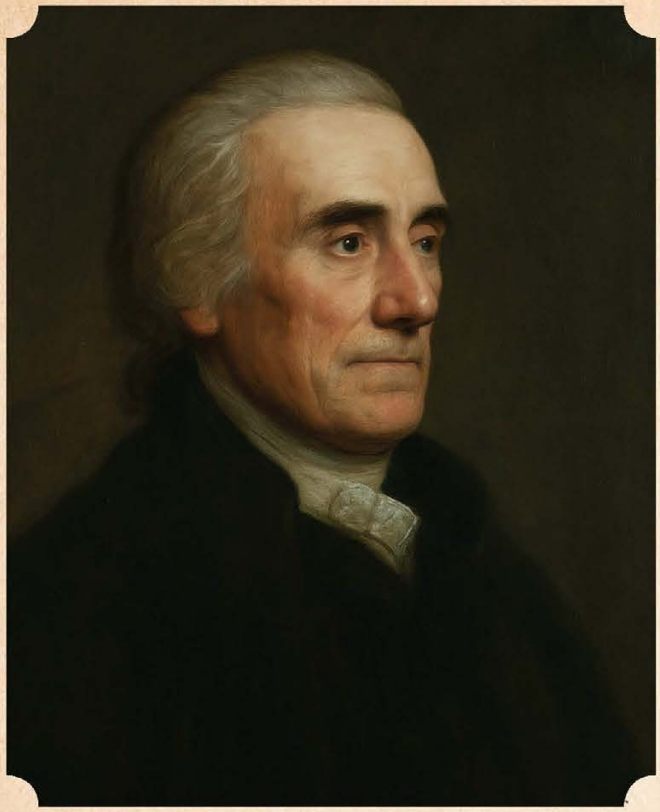
The son of Puritan parents, Adams was raised with strong religious values. Initially expected to become a minister, he graduated from Harvard College in 1740 and later turned to politics. He was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives and later served in the Continental Congress. By the 1770s, he had become one of the leading advocates for American independence.

Adams was a founding member of the Sons of Liberty, the group that famously organized the Boston Tea Party, destroying British tea in protest of new taxes.

Adams participated in the First and Second Continental Congress, signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Due to his strong opposition to British rule, he was viewed as a major threat to the Crown—so much so that British authorities offered pardons to all who laid down their arms after the Battle of Lexington and Concord except Adams and John Hancock.

After the war, Adams helped draft the Massachusetts state constitution and served as governor of Massachusetts. He died on October 2, 1803, at the age of 81. His hometown newspaper remembered him as the "Father of the American Revolution."

Scan to watch our video about Samuel Adams



Robert Treat Paine

Robt Treat Paine

1731–1814

MASSACHUSETTS

Of the four signers from Massachusetts, Robert Treat Paine is lesser known today than John Hancock, John Adams, and Samuel Adams, yet he left a lasting mark on the founding of the United States.

Born on March 11, 1731, in Boston, Massachusetts, Paine was the son of a pastor-turned-merchant and descended from Mayflower settler Stephen Hopkins. He entered Harvard College at 14, graduating at 18, and pursued various careers—including teaching, preaching, and even whaling in Greenland—before turning to law. In 1761, he moved to Taunton and became a respected attorney.

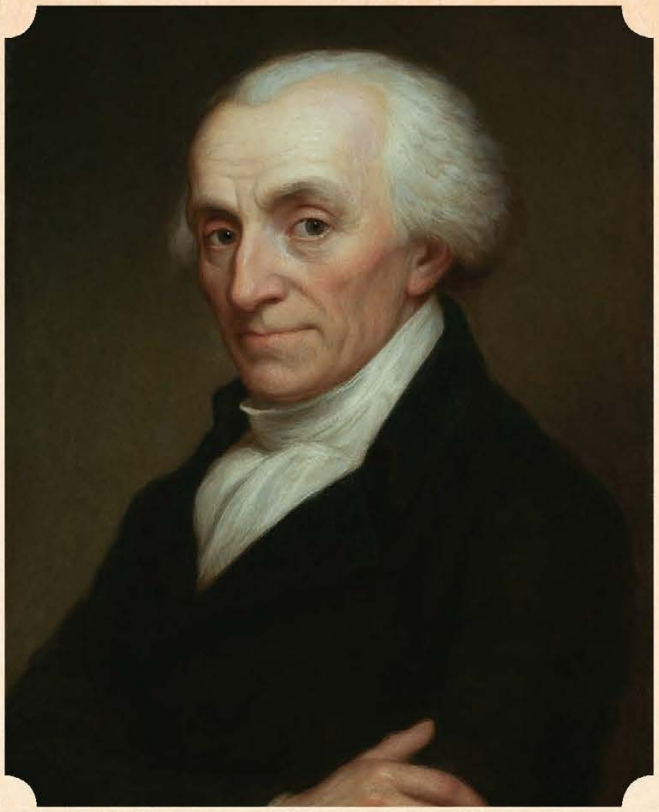
Paine's legal prominence grew alongside his rival, John Adams. In 1770, the two faced off in the Boston Massacre trial, where Paine prosecuted British soldiers and Adams served as defense counsel. After six days in court, Paine lost the case.

Despite the loss, his performance earned him widespread recognition. In 1774, Paine was elected to the Continental Congress, and in 1776, he signed the Declaration of Independence.

Shortly thereafter, Paine was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where he served as speaker and helped draft the state constitution. He became the state's first Attorney General, notably prosecuting Shays' Rebellion, and from 1790 to 1804, served as a Massachusetts Supreme Court Justice.

Late in life, Paine co-founded the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He died in 1814, at the age of 83, and was buried in Boston's Granary Burying Ground, also the resting place of the Boston Massacre victims.

Scan to watch our video about Robert Treat Paine



Elbridge Gerry

Elbridge Gerry

1744–1814

MASSACHUSETTS

Elbridge Gerry was a merchant, politician, and diplomat who served as the fifth vice president of the United States.

Born on July 17, 1744, in Marblehead, Massachusetts, Gerry came from a family of successful merchants. He graduated from Harvard College and worked closely with Samuel Adams. After a brief time in commerce, he entered public service as a member of the Massachusetts Legislature and General Court.

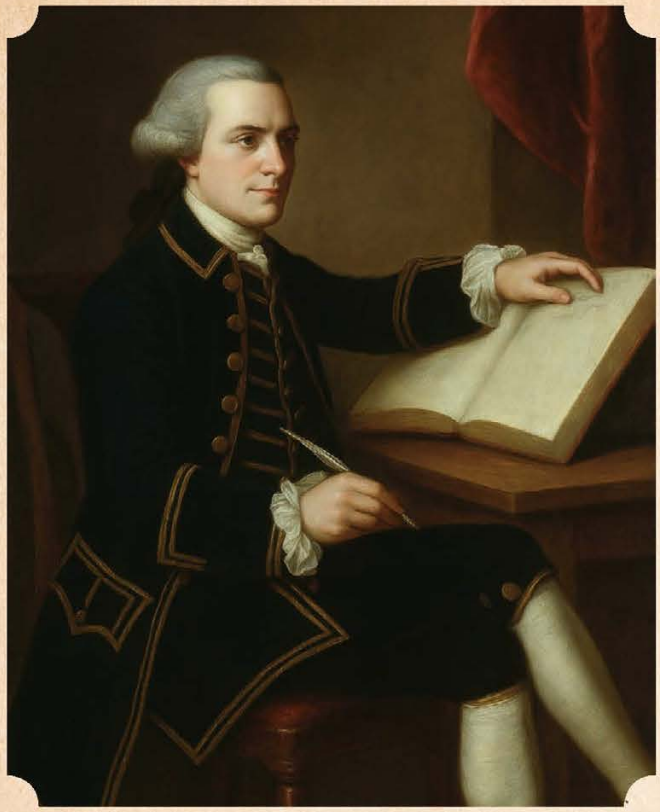
In 1775, Gerry was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence, and continued to serve until 1780.

In response to Shays' Rebellion, Gerry was selected to attend the Constitutional Convention in 1787. He chaired the committee that helped forge the Great Compromise, which created a bicameral legislature with popular representation in the U.S. House of Representatives and equal representation for each state in the Senate.

Concerned about centralized power, Gerry—along with Edmund Randolph and George Mason—refused to sign the Constitution without a Bill of Rights. After ratification, he served two terms in Congress, retiring in 1793.

In 1797, Gerry participated in a diplomatic mission to France that resulted in the "XYZ Affair," a scandal in which French agents demanded bribes from American envoys as a condition for negotiations—sparking public outrage in the United States. He later served as governor of Massachusetts beginning in 1810, where the state legislature's redistricting decisions led to the term "gerrymandering." In 1813, he became vice president under James Madison, serving until his death in 1814 at age 70.

Scan to watch our video about Elbridge Gerry



John Hancock

1737–1793

MASSACHUSETTS

John Hancock, born on January 23, 1737, in Braintree, Massachusetts, is widely remembered for his prominent signature on the Declaration of Independence. His contributions to the founding of the United States extended far beyond that moment.

After his father's death in 1744, Hancock was raised by his wealthy uncle, Thomas Hancock, a successful Boston merchant. This afforded him a strong education, and he graduated from Harvard College in 1754 at age 17. He then apprenticed in his uncle's mercantile business and upon his uncle's death in 1764, inherited a large estate, becoming one of the wealthiest men in the colonies.

Hancock entered politics in 1765, holding several local offices before joining the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, the colony's Patriot-led governing body. He actively opposed British taxation policies, including the Stamp Act, and supported boycotts against British imports.

In 1768, British officials seized Hancock's ship, the *Liberty*, for allegedly smuggling wine. Though charges were dropped, the event galvanized colonial resistance and raised Hancock's profile as a Patriot leader.

Hancock was elected to the Continental Congress, serving twice as its president between 1775 and 1786. On July 4, 1776, he became the first to sign the Declaration of Independence, with a signature famously so large, that as legend has it, King George III would be able to see it without reading glasses.

After the war, Hancock returned to Massachusetts, where he served multiple terms as governor from 1780 until his death in 1793. He played a key role in Massachusetts' ratification of the U.S. Constitution and supported the Bill of Rights. Hancock died on October 8, 1793, at age 56.

Scan to watch our video about John Hancock

Signers by State

NEW HAMPSHIRE

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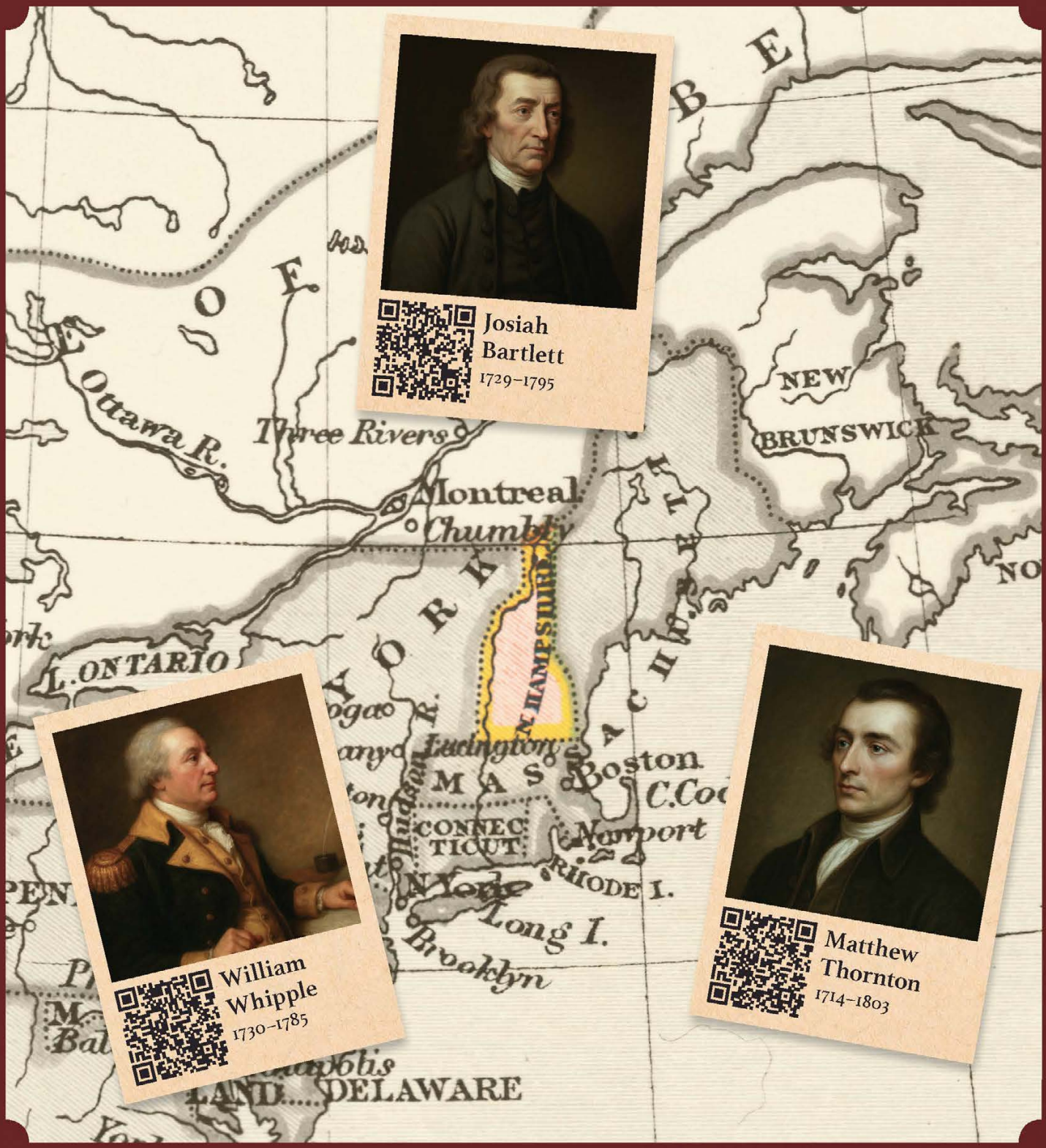


Josiah Bartlett

Josiah Bartlett

1729–1795

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Josiah Bartlett was a physician, statesman, and patriot, whose intellect and vision earned him a place among the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

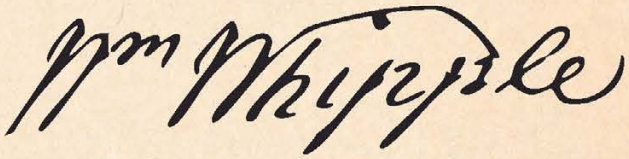
Born on November 21, 1729, in Amesbury, Massachusetts, Bartlett began studying medicine at the age of 16, practicing under several local doctors before establishing his own practice in Kingston, New Hampshire. Pioneering new ways to treat common ailments such as fevers and diphtheria, Bartlett quickly earned the respect of his adoptive colony as a skilled doctor.

Bartlett's influence extended beyond his medical practice. In the 1760s, as tensions with Britain increased, Bartlett was elected to the colonial assembly. In 1774, he became such a fervent advocate for American independence that when voting for independence Bartlett reportedly "made the rafters shake with the loudness of his approval." He was among the first to vote for independence in 1776, and risked his own personal safety by enlisting in the New Hampshire state militia. At one point, Bartlett's home was burned to the ground, likely by British loyalists.

Bartlett played a key role in drafting the New Hampshire state constitution and served as chief justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court. In 1790, he became the first governor of New Hampshire. He died on May 19, 1795, at the age of 65, but his contributions in medicine and politics fundamentally shaped our nation.

Scan to watch our video about Josiah Bartlett

William Whipple



1730–1785

NEW HAMPSHIRE

William Whipple was born in 1730 in Kittery, Massachusetts (now Kittery, Maine) into a seafaring family. After finishing school, he went to sea and became a ship captain by age 21, eventually amassing a small fortune. In 1759, he left maritime life and opened a mercantile firm in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, with two of his brothers.

By 1775, Whipple was a leading citizen of Portsmouth and helped elect delegates to the Continental Congress. In May, he was elected to represent Portsmouth in the Provincial Congress.

In 1776, Whipple won a seat in the Continental Congress. That January, he wrote to Josiah Bartlett, "Nothing less than the fate of America depends on the virtue of her sons..." He voted for independence on July 2 and signed the Declaration of Independence on August 2.

Whipple served on Congress's Marine Committee and delivered orders to John Paul Jones, assigning him command of the *Ranger*. In 1777, Whipple was appointed Brigadier General of the New Hampshire militia. He led four regiments during the Battle of Saratoga and helped negotiate surrender terms with British General Burgoyne.

By 1780, Whipple returned to New Hampshire and served in multiple roles, including state legislator, associate justice of the New Hampshire Superior Court, and receiver of finances in the state.

Whipple died in Portsmouth in 1785. The New Hampshire Gazette wrote, "In him concentrated every principle that exalts the dignity of man. His disinterested patriotism and public services are now known to all. He was generous and humane, and the elements so mixed in him that nature might rise up and say THIS WAS A MAN."

Scan to watch our video about William Whipple

Matthew Thornton

Matthew Thornton

1714–1803

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Matthew Thornton was born in Ireland in 1714 and moved to what would become Maine as a child. At age eight, his family fled an Indian attack, escaping by canoe to Casco Bay, and later settled in Worcester, Massachusetts. Thornton received a classical education at Worcester Academy, studied medicine, and began a successful practice in Londonderry, New Hampshire in 1740.

In 1745, he served as a surgeon for the New Hampshire militia during King George's War. During the Battle of Louisburg, he earned a reputation as an excellent doctor by losing only six men to sickness. This led to his election in 1758 to the colonial legislature, where he became a vocal critic of British Parliament.

Following the Battle of Lexington and Concord in 1775, Governor John Wentworth fled New Hampshire, and Thornton was named president of the New Hampshire Provincial Congress. In that role, he urged citizens to take up arms, citing British cruelty and civilian suffering.

Thornton led the committee to draft a new state constitution, chaired the Council of Safety, and served in both the Upper and Lower houses of the legislature.

In September 1776, Thornton was appointed a delegate to the Continental Congress. Officially seated on November 4, he became one of the last signers of the Declaration of Independence. Though late, he insisted on being added to the list, wanting the "same privilege as the others... to be hanged for his patriotism."

In 1777, he left Congress and resumed his earlier role on the New Hampshire Superior Court. Thornton died in 1803, at approximately 89 years old. His original gravestone bore the inscription: "An Honest Man."

Scan to watch our video about Matthew Thornton

Signers by State

RHODE ISLAND

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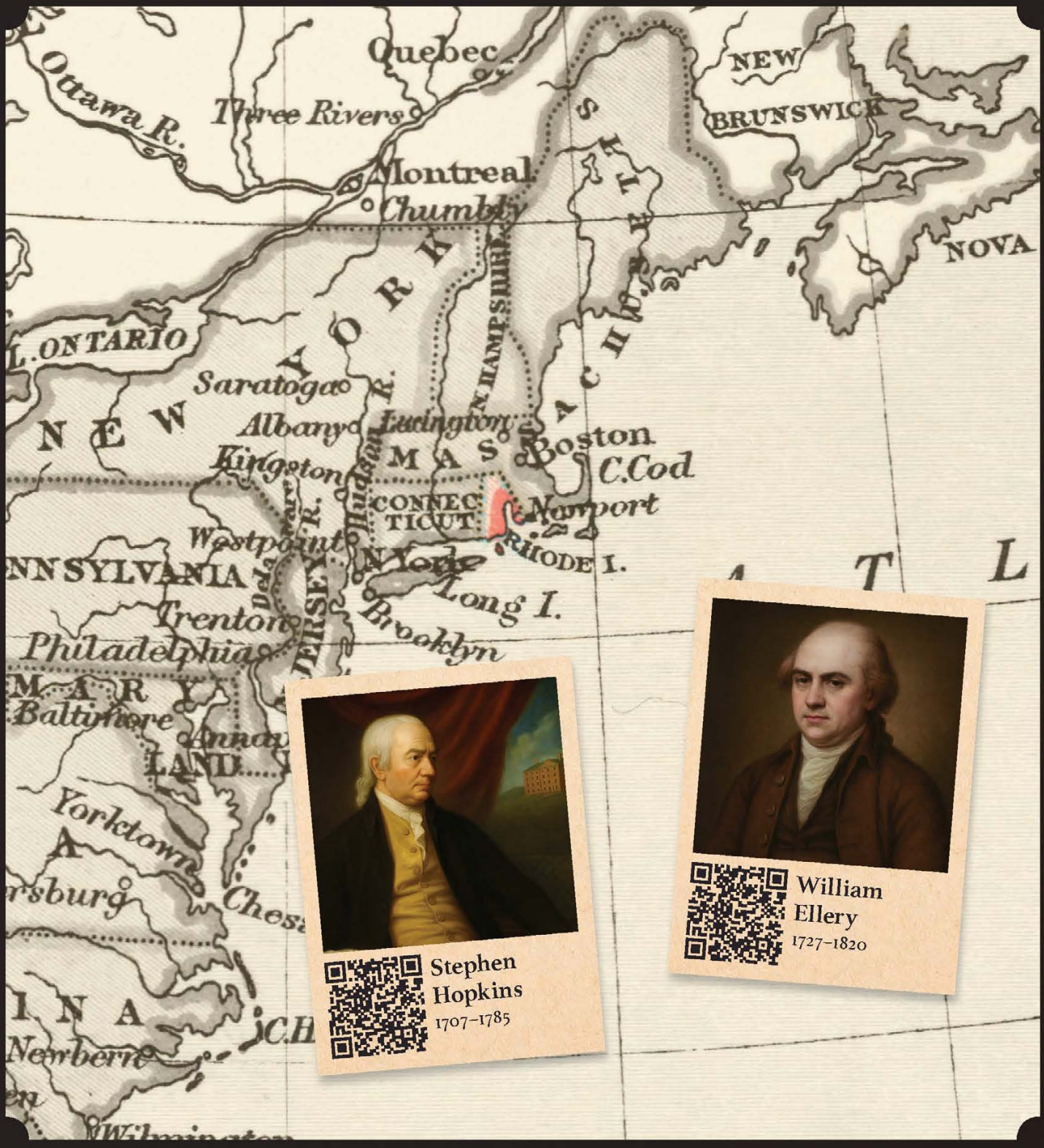
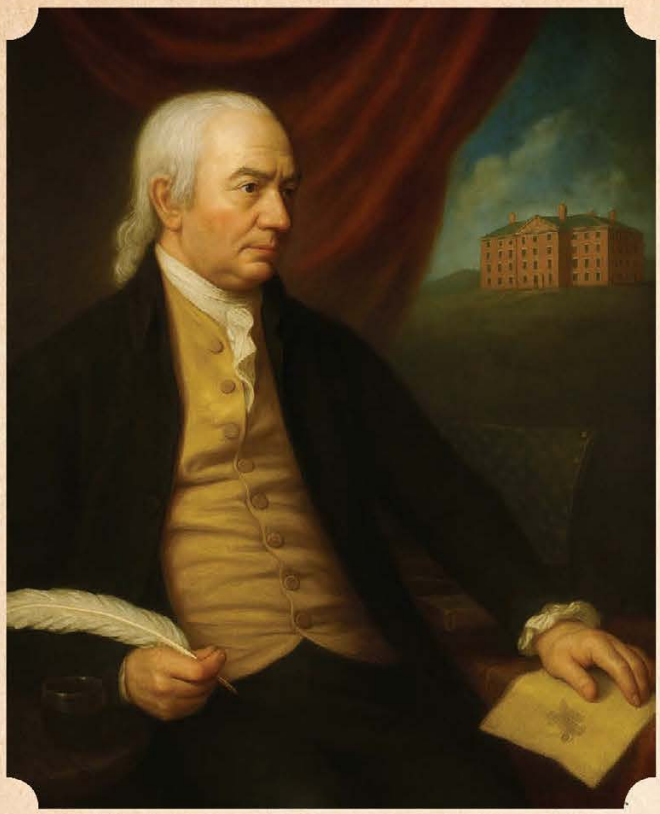
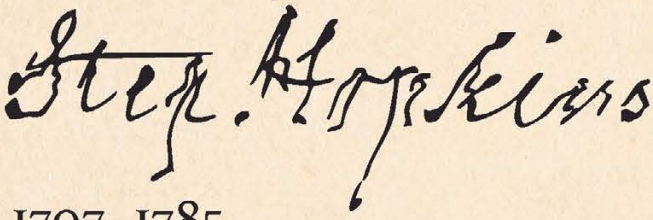




Stephen Hopkins



1707–1785

RHODE ISLAND

Stephen Hopkins, born on March 7, 1707, in Providence, Rhode Island, was a leading figure of early American patriotism and a respected legal authority.

Though he had no formal education, Hopkins was a naturally gifted intellect who taught himself surveying and other practical sciences. A committed student from a young age, he began public service at 23 as a justice of the peace, quickly earning a reputation for competent leadership. He also became a successful merchant and amassed significant land holdings, expanding his influence in Rhode Island.

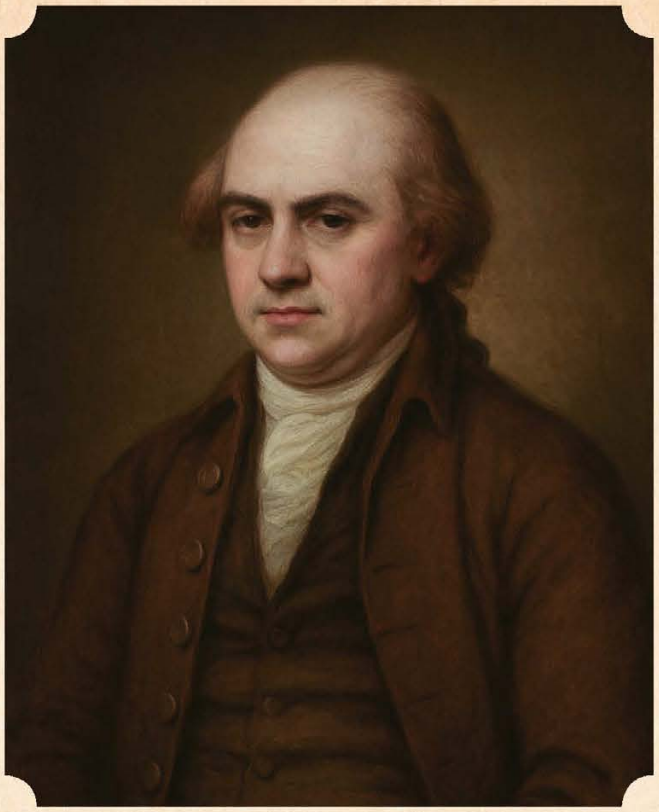
Before the Revolution, Hopkins rose through colonial government ranks, serving as justice, and later chief justice, of the Rhode Island Supreme Court by 1751.

As colonial governor, he supported British efforts during the French and Indian War while taking unorthodox positions for the time, notably advocating to ban the importation of slaves into Rhode Island.

He played a central role in the aftermath of the 1772 Gaspee Affair, in which colonists burned a British naval ship. Hopkins and other sympathetic officials helped ensure no colonists were indicted, shielding Patriots from British retaliation.

A vocal critic of British overreach, Hopkins was chosen as one of Rhode Island's two delegates to the Continental Congress. Despite suffering from palsy, which caused his hand to tremble, he signed the Declaration of Independence at age 69, declaring, "My hand trembles, but my heart does not."

Scan to watch our video about Stephen Hopkins



William Ellery

William Ellery

1727–1820

RHODE ISLAND

Born on December 22, 1727 in Newport, Rhode Island, Ellery followed in the footsteps of his father, a prominent merchant and political leader, attending Harvard at the age of 16. After graduating in 1747, he returned home and tried his hand at several occupations, eventually taking up the study of law in 1770.

Renowned for his support of Patriot causes, Ellery was selected as a delegate for the Second Continental Congress, where he earned a reputation for his witty epigrams. He is cited as calling the Declaration of Independence a "Death Warrant." Yet, Ellery signed with undaunted resolution. Through his epigrams, he brought humor and friendly banter to Congress. For instance, in the below epigram Ellery criticized his colleague from Philadelphia, Andrew Allen, who was reluctant to sign the Declaration.

A Commissioner, to the people of P_ _ _ _ a
Attend all ye People of ev'ry degree
No longer pretend that your Country you'll free
Declare for your Treasons a hearty Contrition
Regard as you tender your lives Admonition
E're too late to flee from impending Perdition
Who like me to the King Allegiance will swear
And future Submission to Congress forbear
Leave all his old Friends to the Parliaments Fury
Let Rebels be hang'd without Judge or Jury
Escapes condemnation to gibbet or halter
Nor needs forfeiture fear unless times should alter.

Ellery lived to the age of 92, keeping active in public affairs, and spending many hours in scholarly pursuits and correspondence.

Scan to watch our video about William Ellery

Signers by State

CONNECTICUT

Scan the QR codes to video profiles and White House exhibit photos.
Explore the biography of each signer in more detail in the following pages.

Roger Sherman
1721–1793

Samuel Huntington
1731–1796

William Williams
1731–1811

Oliver Wolcott
1726–1797

Roger Sherman

Roger Sherman

1721–1793

CONNECTICUT

Roger Sherman, born on April 19, 1721, in Newton, Massachusetts, was the only person to have signed all four of the most significant documents in our nation's early history: the Continental Association from the first Continental Congress, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution.

The son of a farmer and cobbler, Sherman received minimal education. Nevertheless, he was an avid learner who made extensive use of his father's sizable personal library. In 1743, Sherman moved to New Milford, Connecticut. There, he worked as a surveyor and storekeeper. He was admitted to the bar in 1754, despite having no formal legal training, and began his legal career.

Sherman entered politics in 1755 as a justice of the peace and a member of Connecticut's General Assembly. During the Second Continental Congress, Sherman was appointed to the Committee of Five where he helped review and refine Thomas Jefferson's drafts of the Declaration of Independence.

Following America's War for Independence, Sherman participated in the Constitutional Convention and proposed the Great Compromise (also known as the "Connecticut Compromise"), establishing a bicameral legislature with equal state representation in the Senate and population-based representation in the House.

In 1784, Sherman was elected as the mayor of New Haven, Connecticut and held this position concurrently alongside others until his death. Sherman was elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1789. In 1791, he was chosen to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate. Two years later, he fell ill with typhoid fever and died.

Scan to watch our video about Roger Sherman

Samuel Huntington

Sam^el Huntington

1731–1796
CONNECTICUT

Samuel Huntington, born in July 1731 in Windham, Connecticut, was a lifelong public servant devoted to the cause of American independence. Raised on his family's 180-acre farm, Huntington received his early education in local public schools and grew up in what would now be considered a middle-class household.

He initially apprenticed as a laborer making barrels and casks, but turned his interest toward law. Teaching himself with borrowed books, he was admitted to the bar at age 23 and earned such a strong reputation that he was appointed King's Attorney for Connecticut.

Huntington's political career advanced quickly. He served in the Connecticut Assembly and, by the mid-1770s, opposed British laws aimed at suppressing colonial resistance. He was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence and supported the Articles of Confederation.

From 1779 to 1781, he served as president of the Confederation Congress, the legislative body that governed the U.S. during the Revolutionary War. After the war, he returned to Connecticut, where he served on the state's Supreme Court and as lieutenant governor.

In 1786, Huntington was elected governor of Connecticut, a role he held until his death in 1796. His administration focused on educational reform and opposing the slave trade.

Huntington died in office on January 5, 1796, at age 64, after almost a decade serving as governor. Though he and his wife, Martha, had no children, his legacy endures as one of service, integrity, and dedication to the founding of the nation.

Scan to watch our video about Samuel Huntington

William Williams

1731–1811

CONNECTICUT

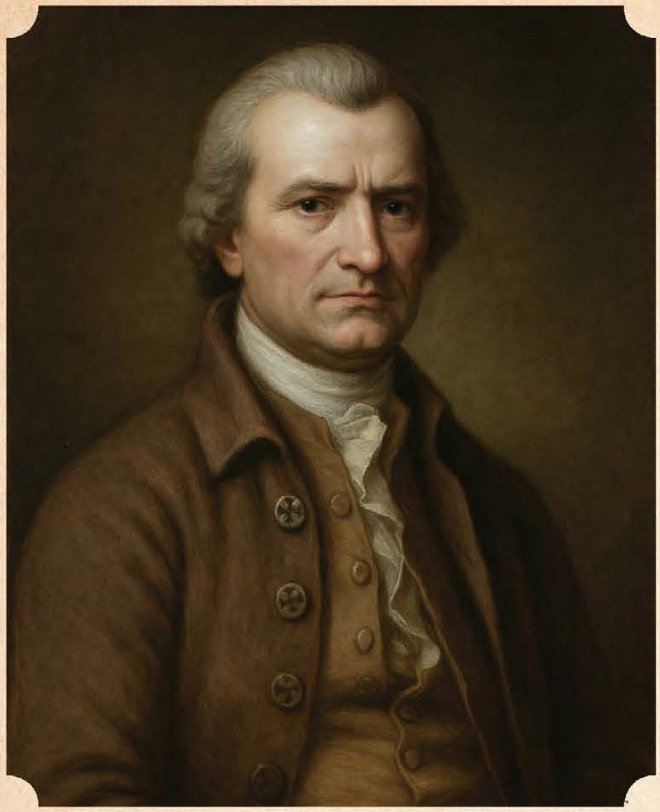
William Williams was born in 1731 in Lebanon, Connecticut, the son and grandson of Christian ministers and Harvard graduates. At 16, he entered Harvard College and later studied theology under his father.

His plans to enter the ministry changed after he served in the French and Indian War, an experience that led to his deep distrust of British officials. After returning to Connecticut, Williams opened a shop, became town clerk in 1753, and began serving in the Connecticut House in 1757, rising to become speaker of the lower house in 1775.

In 1771, Williams married into the Trumbull family and worked closely with Governor Jonathan Trumbull in drafting Revolutionary papers and publishing Patriot writings. In 1773, he was appointed a colonel in the 12th regiment of the Connecticut militia, a post he resigned upon joining the Continental Congress. In 1775, he raised funds door-to-door to support Connecticut troops at Ticonderoga.

Appointed to Congress in June 1776, Williams arrived too late to vote for independence but signed the Declaration in August. In 1788, he served as a delegate to Connecticut's constitutional ratifying convention, where he voted in favor of the U.S. Constitution. Williams died in 1811.

Scan to watch our video about William Williams



Oliver Wolcott

Oliver Wolcott

1726–1797

CONNECTICUT

Oliver Wolcott, one of fifteen children, was born on November 20, 1726 in Windsor, Connecticut. Oliver's great-grandfather served in the first general assembly of Connecticut, and his father served as governor.

Oliver placed top of his class at Yale College before beginning his military career. With a captain's commission, Wolcott led a voluntary militia during the French and Indian War, only returning home upon the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.

While Wolcott attended the Second Continental Congress in 1776, he was absent from the formal signing of the Declaration of Independence in August due to illness. He signed two months later.

Wolcott was in New York City on July 9, 1776 when General George Washington read the Declaration of Independence to his troops, which subsequently led to a demonstration that toppled the statue of King George. Wolcott shipped the pieces of the statute to Connecticut, and back home, he, his family, and fellow Patriots melted the pieces and turned them into bullets for the war effort – totaling 42,088 bullets.

Following the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Wolcott continued to exercise leadership over the Connecticut militia. He was elected lieutenant governor of Connecticut in 1786, and governor in 1796. Oliver Wolcott died on December 1, 1797, at age 71. He was married to Laura Collins, and the two had four children.

Scan to watch our video about Oliver Wolcott

Signers by State

NEW YORK

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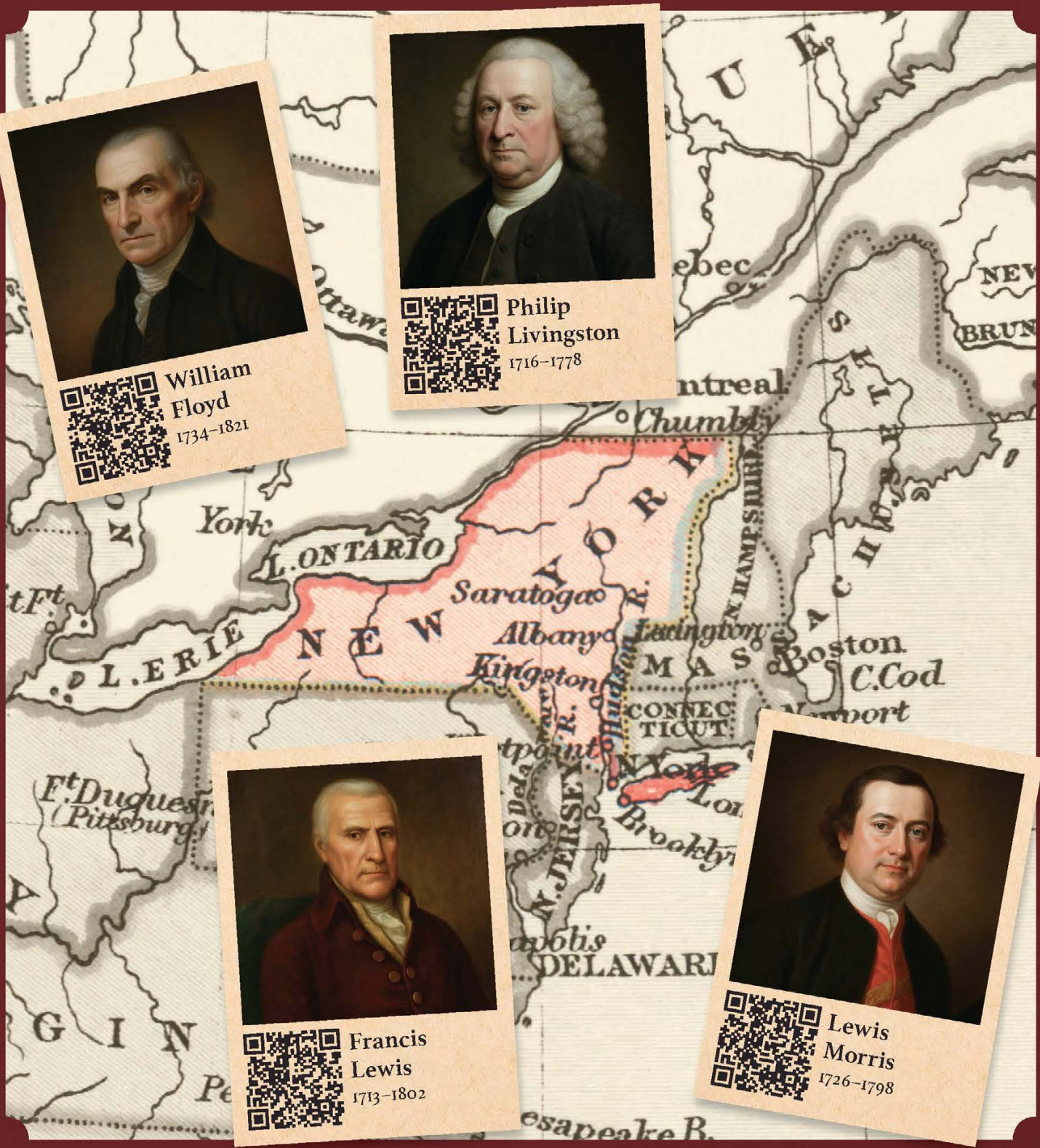
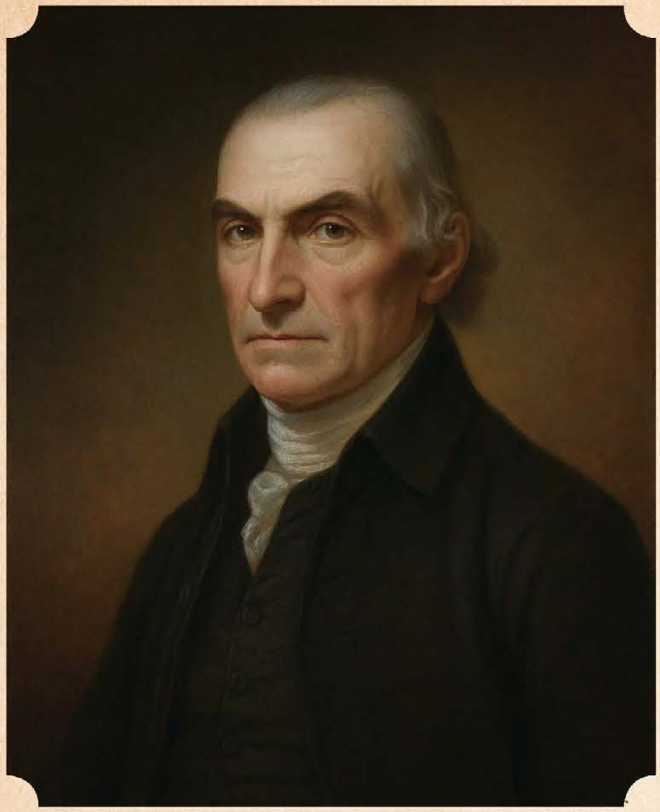
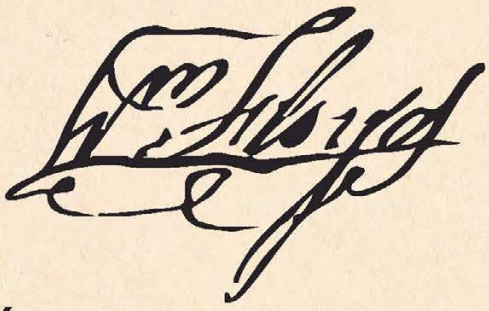




William Floyd



1734–1821

NEW YORK

William Floyd was born on December 17, 1734, on Long Island, New York, the second of nine children. His father, a successful farmer of Welsh descent, raised the family with a strong work ethic and practical education. When Floyd's parents died in 1755, he inherited the family estate and took responsibility for his siblings. He married in 1760 and managed both the farm and family.

Floyd became a respected figure in his community and helped lead the local militia, attaining the rank of colonel in 1775. He supported the Patriot cause early, attending meetings opposing the British closure of the Port of Boston.

In 1774, Floyd was chosen to represent Suffolk County in the Continental Congress, where he served until 1777 and again from 1779 to 1783. During the war, he also held the rank of major general in the militia.

While Floyd served in Congress, the British occupied his home, converting it into a barracks. He fled to Connecticut with his wife and three children. The hardships of war took a toll on his family; his wife died in 1781 after prolonged illness and stress.

After the war, Floyd served several terms in the New York State Senate, supported the U.S. Constitution, and participated in the New York Constitutional Convention of 1801. He was elected to the first U.S. Congress, serving from 1789 to 1791.

In later life, Floyd invested in land in central New York, securing a state grant of over 10,000 acres. He spent summers developing the property and eventually relocated there, building a home near present-day Westerville, New York. He died in 1821 at the age of 86.

Scan to watch our video about William Floyd

Philip Livingston

Phil. Livingston

1716–1778

NEW YORK

Philip Livingston, born on January 15, 1716, in Albany, New York, hailed from the wealthy and influential Livingston family. Philip spent his youth in opulent manor houses and townhomes before attending Yale College in the 1730s.

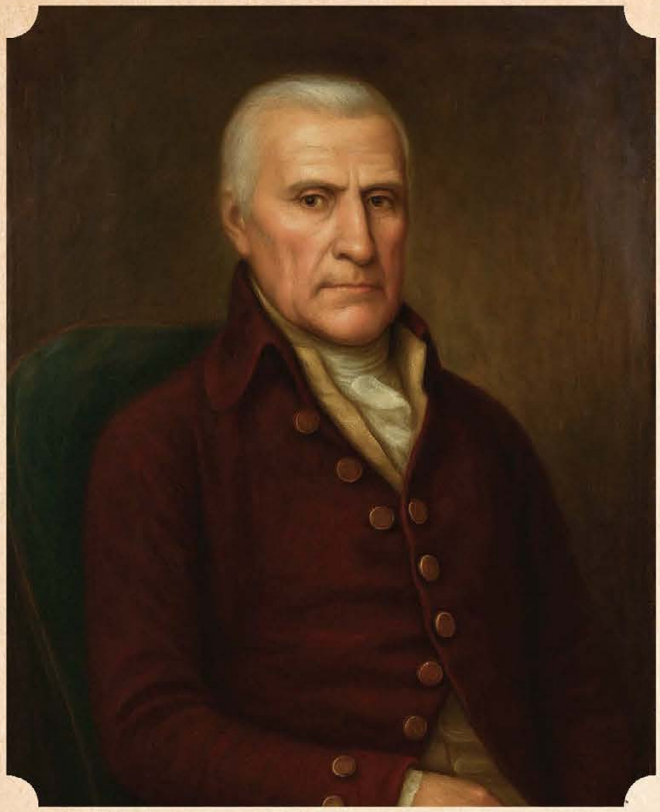
After graduating, Philip settled in New York City and soon became one of the town's most successful merchants. By the 1750s, Livingston entered public life, serving as an alderman, and then elected representative within the British colonial government.

By the 1760s, British taxes designed to increase government revenue began to become unpopular with many American colonists. Livingston began to speak out publicly against these attempts at levying taxes on colonists without representation in Parliament. While resisting violent acts of protest, he attended the Stamp Act Congress of 1765.

Defeated for reelection in the colonial assembly by fierce British loyalists, Livingston was free to devote more of his time to the Patriot cause. In 1774, he was selected by members of his community to join the New York delegation in the First Continental Congress. Livingston was largely skeptical of American independence, his concerns of unprecedented levels of disorder often outweighing his desire to see British authority limited. He was not alone. The New York Assembly, under pressure to seek reconciliation, delayed in conveying their instructions to their delegates to the Continental Congress. When permission was finally received from New York, Livingston joined the rest of his colleagues and signed the Declaration of Independence one month late—on August 2, 1776.

Philip Livingston died of an illness two years later, at the age of 62. He left behind his wife, eight children, and a legacy of measured but steadfast patriotism.

Scan to watch our video about Philip Livingston



Francis Lewis

1713–1802

NEW YORK

Francis Lewis was a Welsh immigrant, merchant, prisoner of war, and supporter of American independence.

He was born in Llandaff, Wales, on March 21, 1713, and educated in Scotland and London. After inheriting his father's estate at 21, he moved to the American colonies in 1734. Lewis's mercantile business thrived in New York and Pennsylvania, and he was contracted by the British military to provide troops with uniforms during the French and Indian War.

In 1756, Lewis was captured by French forces and reportedly shipped to Europe in a crate. He spent seven years as a prisoner of war before being released in a prisoner exchange and returning to America.

Back in New York, Lewis resumed his business and received 5,000 acres from British authorities as compensation for his imprisonment. He became active in colonial politics, protesting the Stamp Act of 1765 and supporting the growing independence movement. In 1775, Lewis was elected to the Continental Congress. He signed the Declaration of Independence on August 2, 1776, after New York granted formal approval. During the war, he supplied the Continental Army with clothing, weapons, and provisions.

His home was later pillaged by British troops, and his wife, Elizabeth, was captured and held under harsh conditions. Though released in a prisoner exchange, she never recovered and died in 1779.

Following her death, Lewis withdrew from politics and spent his remaining years with his family. He died on December 31, 1802, at the age of 89.

Scan to watch our video about Francis Lewis

Lewis Morris

Lewis Morris

1726–1798

NEW YORK

Born in Westchester County, New York, Lewis Morris attended Yale College. He married Mary Walton and they had ten children together.

As the eldest son, Morris acquired his father's estate at Morrisania, New York. Having acquired properties in New York and New Jersey, Morris grew increasingly frustrated with British control over trade policies in the colonies, and eventually became a fierce proponent of independence.

In 1775, Morris was elected to the Second Continental Congress, and from there was sent to the western country to persuade the Indians not to join the British cause.

While the movement for independence grew throughout the colonies, the provincial congress of New York was reluctant to endorse the cause wholeheartedly. Yet, Morris held firm in his ardent fervor for independence. It wasn't until after all other colonies reached a consensus for independence that the New York delegation fully supported the cause. Lewis Morris proudly added his signature to the Declaration of Independence.

In addition to founding father, Morris carried many other titles: judge of Westchester County, senator in New York, major general in the Westchester County Militia, member of New York's first Board of Regents of the University of New York, and delegate to the State Convention that ratified the Federal Constitution in 1788.

During his time in the political sphere of influence, Morris fought to better public education across New York, and supported improved transportation systems for the sake of interstate commerce. He passed away at his beloved Morrisania at age 71.

Scan to watch our video about Lewis Morris

Signers by State

NEW JERSEY

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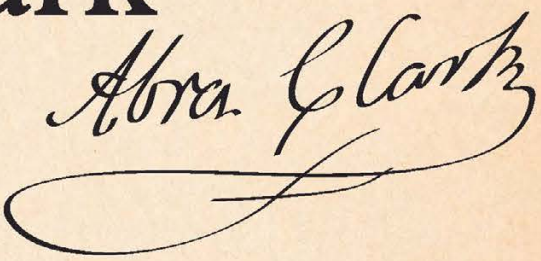
Abraham Clark



1726–1794

NEW JERSEY

Abraham Clark was born on February 15, 1726, in present-day Elizabeth, New Jersey. With little formal education and chronic illnesses that made farm work difficult, he pursued independent study and developed strong skills in mathematics. He became known as a "poor man's counselor," offering legal advice—often for free—despite likely never being formally admitted to the bar.

Clark married Sarah Hatfield, and they had ten children. He began his public career as high sheriff of Essex County before joining the New Jersey colonial legislature in 1775.

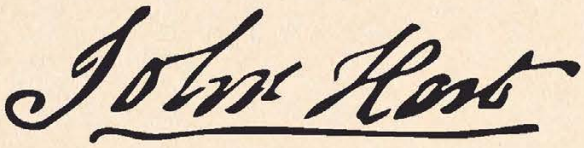
When New Jersey's original delegates opposed independence at the Continental Congress, the state convention replaced them with six new delegates, including Clark. He signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and remained a steady presence in the Continental Congress, often serving simultaneously in the state legislature. During the war, two of his sons were captured and imprisoned by the British aboard the *Jersey* prison ship.

After the war, Clark was one of twelve delegates to attend the Annapolis Convention of 1786, addressing the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Though illness prevented him from attending the Constitutional Convention, he lobbied for the inclusion of a Bill of Rights.

In later years, Clark was elected to the second and third U.S. Congresses. He died of heat stroke on September 15, 1794, having dedicated his life to the birth of this new nation.

Scan to watch our video about Abraham Clark

John Hart



1713–1779

NEW JERSEY

John Hart was born in Stonington, Connecticut, in 1713. His father, Edward Hart, was a farmer, justice of the peace, and public assessor. Soon after John's birth, the family moved to Hopewell, New Jersey, where Hart would reside for the rest of his life. In 1739, he married Deborah Scudder, and together they had 13 children.

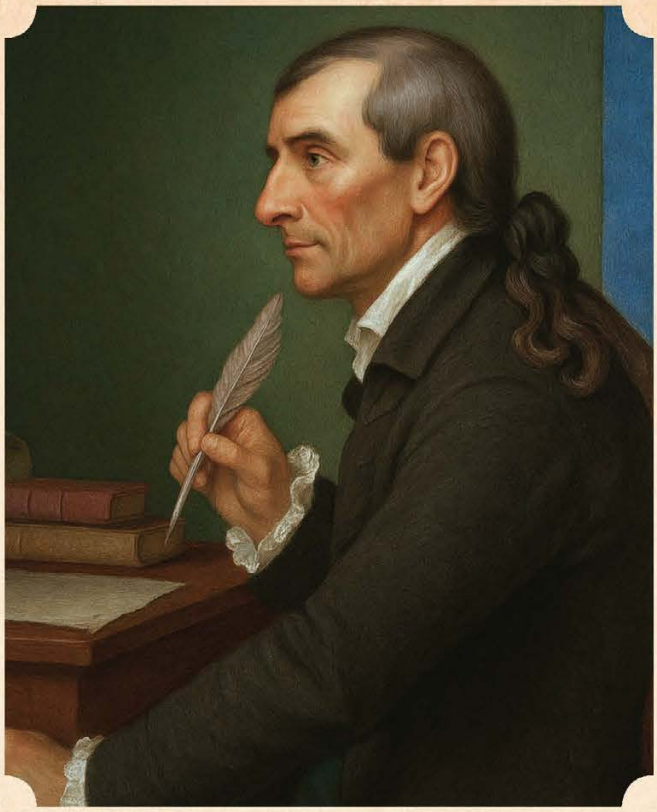
In 1740, Hart began acquiring property, purchasing a 193-acre homestead in Hopewell. Over time, he expanded his holdings and emerged as a respected public figure. He served in various roles, including justice of the peace, county judge, colonial legislator, and judge of the court of common pleas.

As tensions with Britain grew, Hart opposed taxation and the stationing of British troops. In June 1776, he was selected as one of five delegates to represent New Jersey at the Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence. Shortly after, he returned to New Jersey to serve as Speaker of the General Assembly.

In October 1776, John Hart returned home from the Continental Congress to attend to urgent family matters. His wife, Deborah, who had been gravely ill, died on October 8 with John at her side. Later that year, Hart was forced to flee his home as the British invaded Hopewell. After American victories at Trenton and Princeton, Hart returned and was re-elected speaker, serving until November 7, 1778.

In June 1778, Hart invited George Washington and the Continental Army to encamp on his farm before the Battle of Monmouth. Washington and 12,000 troops stayed for several days before marching to victory. John Hart died of kidney stones on May 11, 1779.

Scan to watch our video about John Hart



Francis Hopkinson

Fra! Hopkinson

1737–1791

NEW JERSEY

Francis Hopkinson was a musician, poet, artist, satirist, inventor, jurist, writer, and true Renaissance man of the American Revolution.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Hopkinson was the eldest of eight children and the son of a prominent political leader. He graduated in the first class of the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), studied law, and opened a legal practice in New Jersey. After marrying in 1768, he became a customs collector in New Castle, Delaware.

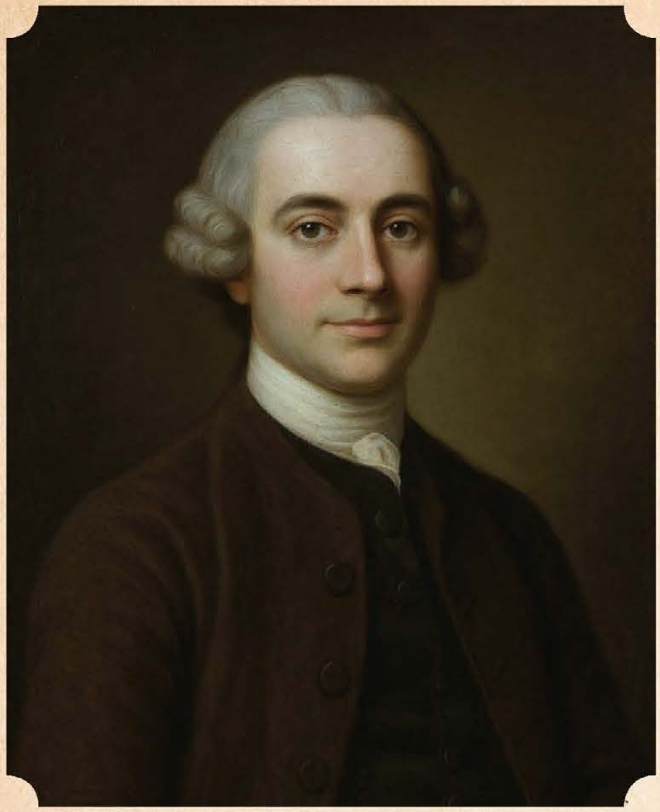
In 1776, Hopkinson represented New Jersey in the Continental Congress, and later held several government posts, including chairman of the Continental Navy Board, treasurer of loans, and judge of the admiralty court of Pennsylvania.

Hopkinson expressed his patriotism through music, satire, and poetry. His 1759 composition, "My Days Have Been So Wondrous Free," is considered the first secular song by an American. He also authored "Temple of Minerva" in 1781, recognized as America's first opera. Hopkinson was also a harpsichordist, church organist, and prolific essayist whose works supported the cause of independence.

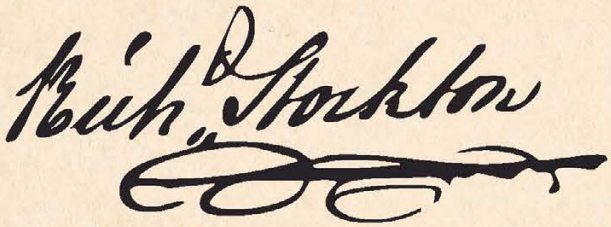
In his allegorical piece "The New Roof," Hopkinson described the Constitution as a structure that strengthened the weakened framework of the Articles of Confederation, portraying the founding generation as architects who saved the building.

Hopkinson is also credited by some historians with designing an early version of the American flag. He became one of the young nation's best-known writers before his death in Philadelphia on May 9, 1791.

Scan to watch our video about Francis Hopkinson



Richard Stockton



1730–1781

NEW JERSEY

Richard Stockton was born on October 1, 1730, in Princeton, New Jersey. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), completed a legal apprenticeship, and was admitted to the bar in 1754.

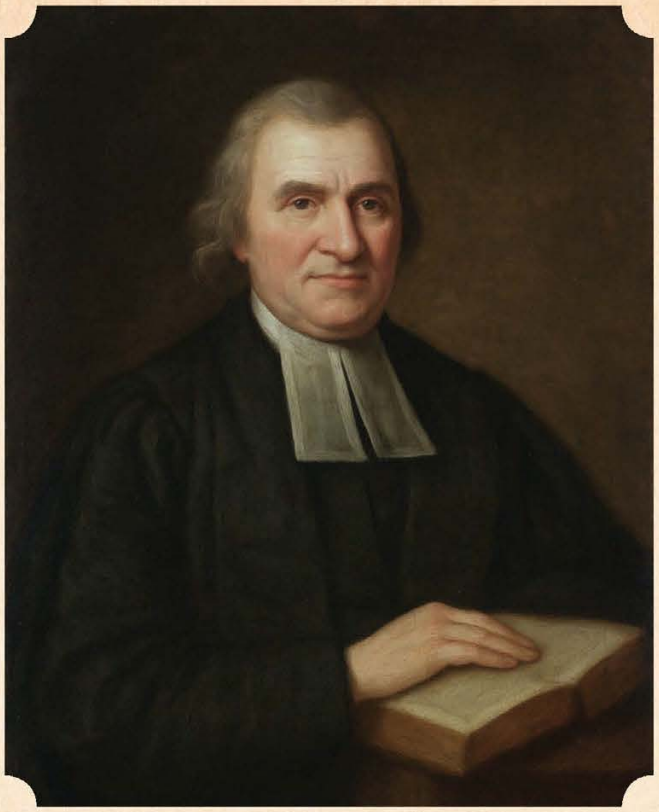
In 1755, Stockton married the poet Annis Boudinot, with whom he had six children. His son Richard would go on to become a representative and senator, and he was father-in-law to Benjamin Rush.

Stockton achieved prominence as a lawyer, and was appointed to the New Jersey Executive Council in 1768, and later to the colony's Supreme Court in 1774. Stockton served as a trustee of the college for 24 years and helped secure the Princeton presidency of the Rev. John Witherspoon.

The Stamp Act crisis of 1765 led him to question Parliament's control over the colonies, and by 1774, he advocated for colonial self-rule under the Crown. Though known as a moderate, his dedication to the cause of American independence intensified, and he was elected to the Second Continental Congress in 1776.

In November 1776, while attempting to evacuate his family from Princeton, he was captured by British forces at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and imprisoned in New York. Treated with inhumane severity, he was released in the early days of 1777 in poor health to discover British troops had occupied and partially burned his home. He died of cancer on February 28, 1781, at the age of 50.

Scan to watch our video about Richard Stockton



John Witherspoon

1723–1794

NEW JERSEY

The only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence, John Witherspoon, born in 1723 in Yester, Scotland, came from a long line of religious leaders.

By age four, he could read the Bible, and when he was 13, he was sent to study at the University of Edinburgh. After being assigned to his first parish in 1745, he wed Elizabeth Montgomery in 1748 and they had nine children.

In 1768, Witherspoon and his family arrived in America after he accepted an offer to be the sixth president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). By 1770, Witherspoon advocated for resistance to the Crown in a commencement address.

In 1776, after signing the Declaration of Independence, Witherspoon, in response to a delegate who claimed that the country was "not ripe for revolution," argued that "we are not only ripe for the measure but in danger of rotting for the want of it."

Following the signing, British troops occupied and destroyed parts of the college, which led Witherspoon to close the doors for a time. But Witherspoon dedicated his efforts to rebuilding Princeton after the war.

Advocating for a curriculum of public service, Witherspoon's students included James Madison, Aaron Burr, 12 members of the Continental Congress, several delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and various U.S. representatives, senators, and federal justices.

As a founding father and esteemed University leader, Witherspoon also served as a member of New Jersey's convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution. After a lifetime of service promoting classical learning and politics grounded in Judeo-Christian ethics, Witherspoon died in 1794 at age 71.

Scan to watch our video about John Witherspoon

Signers by State

PENNSYLVANIA

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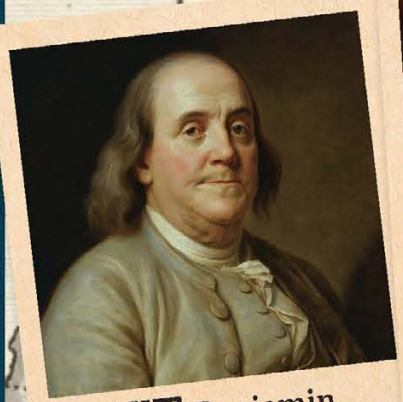
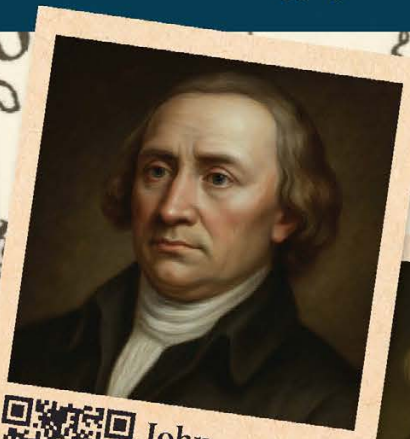


Benjamin Franklin
1706–1790

Robert Morris
1734–1806



John Morton
1725–1777

George Clymer
1739–1813

James Smith
1719–1806

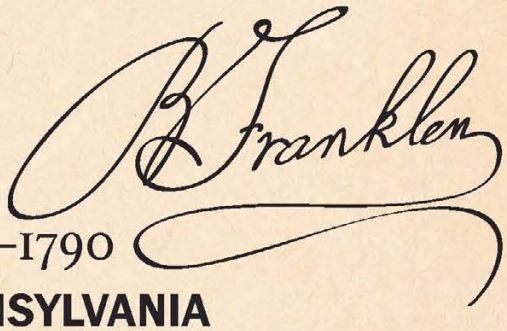
George Taylor
1716–1781

George Ross
1730–1779

James Wilson
1742–1798

Dr. Benjamin Rush
1746–1813

Benjamin Franklin



1706–1790

PENNSYLVANIA

Benjamin Franklin—printer, writer, inventor, diplomat, and Founding Father—was the most widely recognized American on the world stage at the birth of the United States. His wisdom and dedication to liberty helped shape the foundations of American democracy.

Born on January 17, 1706, in Boston, Massachusetts, Franklin was the fifteenth of seventeen children. At 12, he apprenticed in his brother's printing shop. At 17, he moved to Philadelphia, where he launched a successful printing business and published the widely read *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

A self-taught scientist, Franklin gained international fame for his inventions, including the lightning rod, bifocal glasses, the Franklin stove, a musical instrument, and his kite-and-key experiment, which demonstrated that lightning is a form of electricity. Franklin also helped build American civic life. He helped found the first public lending library, created the first volunteer fire department, helped establish the University of Pennsylvania, and supported the chartering of the first public hospital.

At 70, Franklin was the oldest delegate to the Second Continental Congress and served on the Committee of Five that drafted the Declaration of Independence. Soon after its signing, he sailed to France, where he played a crucial role in securing French support for American independence.

In 1787, Franklin served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention at age 81, becoming one of only six men to sign both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. At the Convention's close, when asked what kind of government had been created, he replied, "A republic, madam—if you can keep it."

Franklin died on April 17, 1790, at the age of 84. More than 20,000 people attended his funeral in Philadelphia.

Scan to watch our video about Benjamin Franklin

Robert Morris

Rob Morris

1734–1806

PENNSYLVANIA

Known as the "Financier of the Revolution," Robert Morris was indispensable to the cause of American Independence—using his commercial and financial brilliance to almost single-handedly propel American war efforts through to final victory.

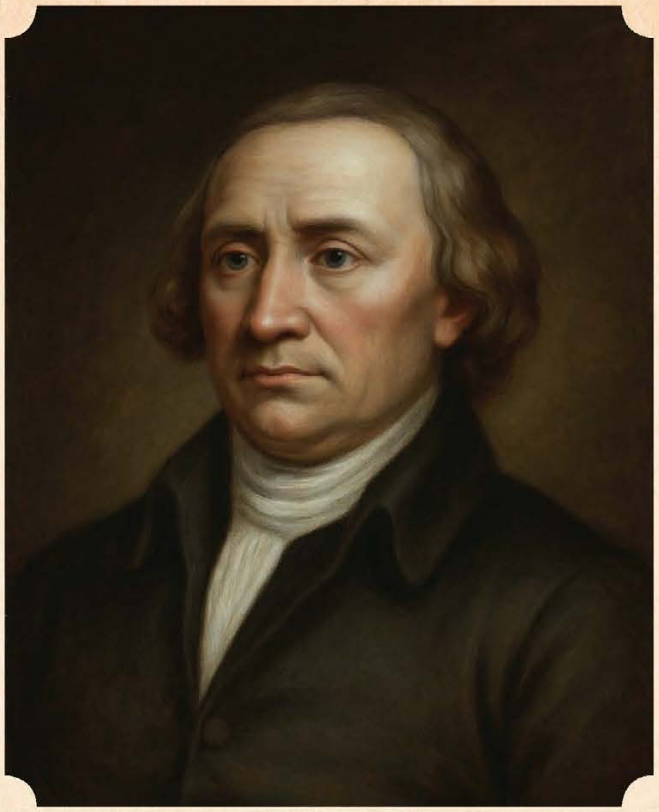
In January of 1734, Morris was born in Liverpool, England. His father was a successful businessman, with extensive ties to the colonies, and brought Robert, at 13, to America.

Soon after, tragedy struck, and Morris was left virtually an orphan—though he would go on to form the Willing, Morris & Co., one of Philadelphia's most successful merchant houses.

In 1775, Morris entered public service, elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly and chosen as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress, where he served on a number of committees.

At the start of the Revolution, he was considered the richest man in America. He worked closely with General George Washington to secure supplies, and often extended his own personal credit or borrowed from friends.

Scan to watch our video about Robert Morris



John Morton

John Morton

1725–1777

PENNSYLVANIA

John Morton was the first of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence to die, passing away less than a year after casting a pivotal vote that changed the course of history.

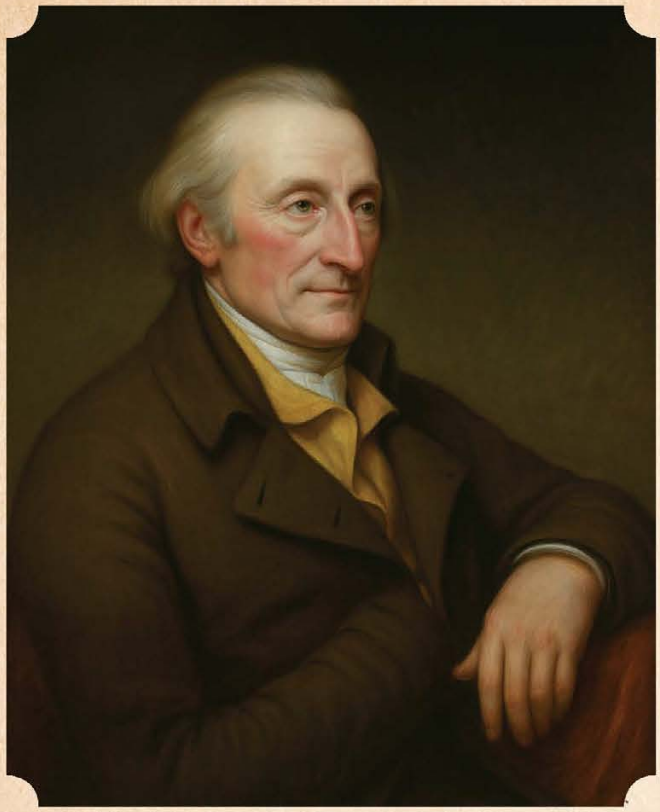
Born in Chester County, Pennsylvania, in 1725, Morton's father died before he was born. He was raised by his mother and stepfather and was largely self-taught. He began his career as a surveyor while tending the family farm.

In 1756, Morton was elected to the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Over 19 terms, he helped write 72 bills, 50 of which became law. In 1775, he was unanimously elected speaker of the Assembly. He also held various public roles, including justice of the peace, sheriff, road commissioner, delegate to the Stamp Act Congress in 1765, and associate justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

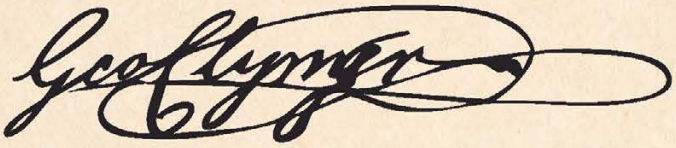
Morton served in both the First and Second Continental Congresses and contributed to drafting the Articles of Confederation, which were ratified after his death. His most consequential act came in July of 1776, when, among Pennsylvania's seven delegates, two voted no, two abstained, and two voted yes. Morton cast the deciding vote for independence, securing Pennsylvania's support.

He died in the spring of 1777 at the age of 51 from tuberculosis. Facing criticism for his vote, Morton's final message to his detractors was: "Tell them they shall live to see the hour when they shall acknowledge it to have been the most glorious service I ever rendered to my country."

Scan to watch our video about John Morton



George Clymer



1739–1813

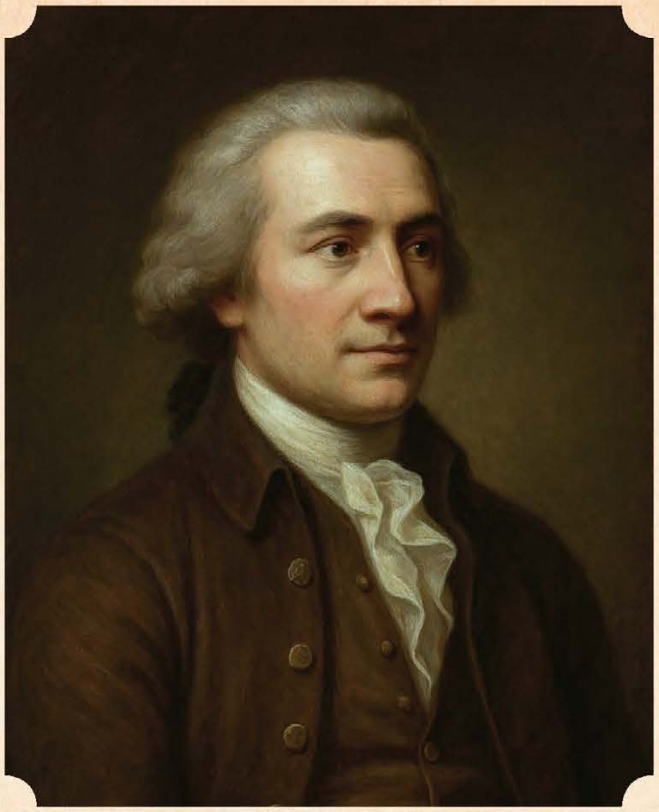
PENNSYLVANIA

George Clymer, a grandson of an original settler of the Penn colony, became an orphan at the age of one. He went to live with a wealthy uncle in Philadelphia, where he received an informal education and he grew up working in his uncle's mercantile firm. His exposure to business and finance would later serve Clymer well in his roles as a leading Philadelphia merchant and a key figure in the Revolutionary cause.

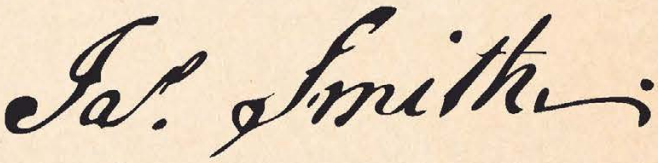
An early patriot, Clymer abhorred the restrictive economic policies of the British, which threatened his business interests. After serving on the Philadelphia Committee of Safety, his expertise in financial matters made him a natural choice for the Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence and served as one of the first two Continental treasurers. There, Clymer made significant contributions, personally underwriting the war effort by exchanging his specie for Continental currency. When British forces threatened to occupy Philadelphia, some members of the Continental Congress fled to Baltimore, but Clymer courageously stayed behind with George Walton and Robert Morris.

After the war, Clymer continued to serve in various capacities, including the Pennsylvania legislature, where he advocated for penal code reform. He also represented Pennsylvania in the Constitutional Convention and later served as a United States representative in the first Congress. Later in life, he accepted a series of appointments and advanced various community projects. He died at the age of 73 in 1813. His legacy remains a testament to the enduring power of commerce, patriotism, and public service.

Scan to watch our video about George Clymer



James Smith



c. 1719–1806

PENNSYLVANIA

James Smith was born in Ireland around 1719. His family fled the landlords of the Old World for the freedom of Pennsylvania around 1727, settling as farmers on the Susquehanna in Chester County.

Receiving a classical education from a local minister, Smith continued his studies in classics, adding land surveying, at the Philadelphia Academy, now known as the University of Pennsylvania.

Admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar in 1745, Smith became a prominent man of the law and business, at one point founding an iron manufacturing company, and soon emerging as a leader in Pennsylvania politics.

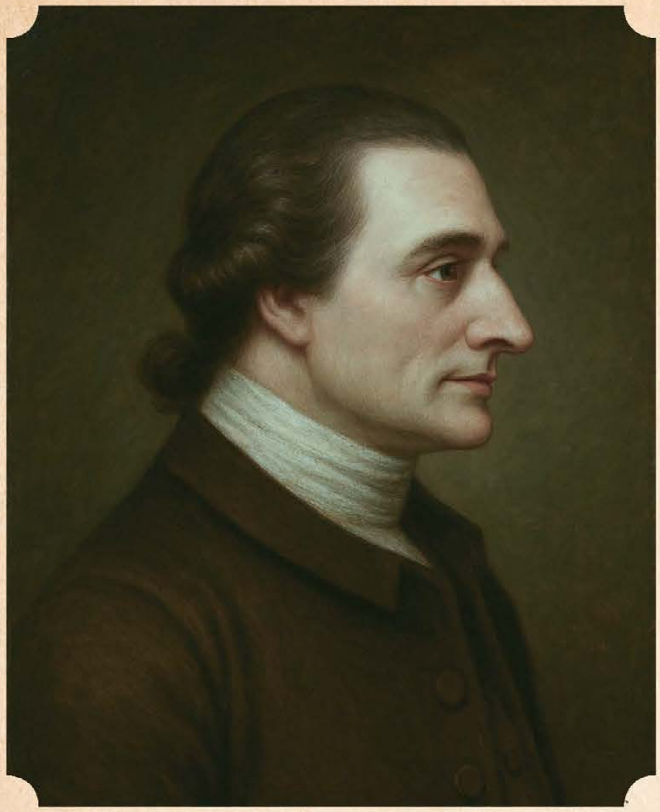
In 1774, Smith helped form and organize the state's support for the cause of independence as he raised a volunteer company of militia.

Smith was appointed to the provincial convention in Philadelphia in 1775 where he declared, "If the British administration should determine by force to effect a submission to the late arbitrary acts of the British parliament, in such a situation, we hold it our indispensable duty to resist such force, and at every hazard to defend the rights and liberties of America." He was then elected to the Second Continental Congress.

He represented Pennsylvania in the Congress until 1778, going on to serve a term in the State Assembly, as a judge of the state High Court of Appeals, and as brigadier general of the Pennsylvania militia in 1781.

He died on July 11, 1806, in York, Pennsylvania, at the age of 87. A fire destroyed his office and papers shortly before his death, contributing to his relative obscurity.

Scan to watch our video about James Smith



George Taylor

Geo. Taylor

1716–1781

PENNSYLVANIA

George Taylor was born in 1716 in Ireland. He immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1736, where he worked as an iron worker for Samuel Nutt at Coventry Forge near Philadelphia.

Nutt died in 1737 and by 1743, Taylor was managing the iron furnace and married to Ann Taylor Savage. Ann died in 1768, and Taylor later had a relationship with Naomi Smith, his housekeeper, with whom he had five children out of wedlock.

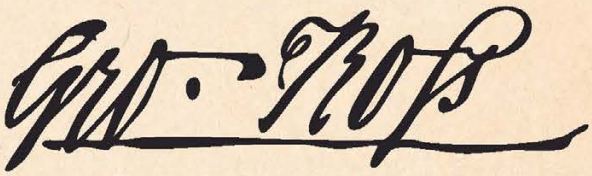
Taylor's political career began in 1747 when he was commissioned captain in the Chester County militia. He served as a justice of the peace when he moved to Easton, Pennsylvania, a member of the provincial assembly, and a judge of the county court. His ironworks, which remained his chief business, became vital during the Revolution, casting grapeshot, cannonballs, bar shot, and cannon for the Continental Army.

In July 1776, Taylor was one of several selected as representatives to the Continental Congress to replace members that had refused to sign the Declaration of Independence; he appended his signature to the document on August 2, 1776.

In March 1777, he was elected to the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, but served only six weeks before retiring due to illness and financial straits. Taylor died on February 23, 1781, at the age of 65.

Scan to watch our video about George Taylor

George Ross



1730–1779

PENNSYLVANIA

Born in New Castle, Delaware, George Ross was raised in a very large family. He received a classical education at home before studying law in Philadelphia under his brother, John Ross. In 1750, at 20 years old, he was admitted to the bar and established a successful legal practice in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where his intellect and eloquence earned him a reputation as a skilled attorney.

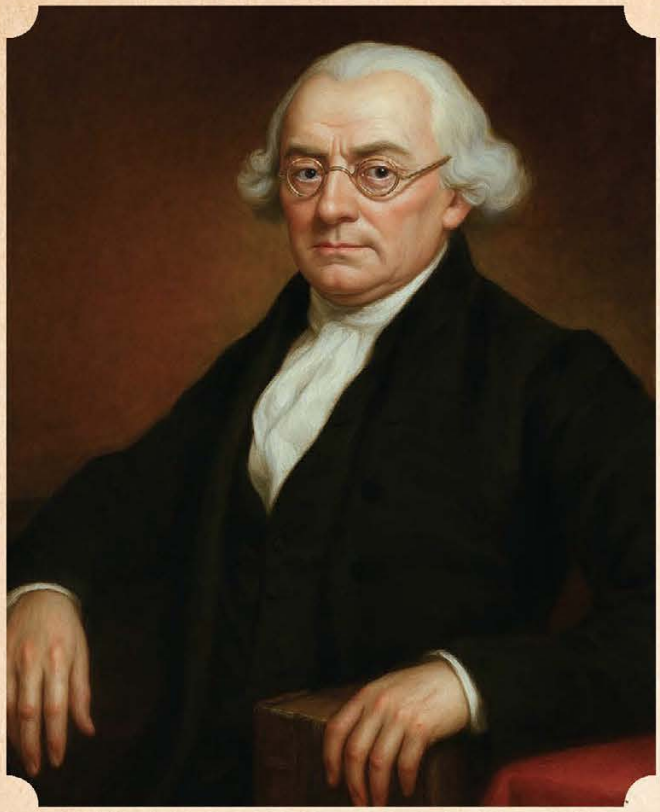
Ross' political and governmental career began in the 1750s when he was chosen to represent the crown of England as the King's prosecutor in Pennsylvania. In 1768, he was elected to the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly. Initially a moderate, he leaned toward reconciliation with Britain but grew increasingly supportive of colonial rights as tensions escalated.

By 1774, he was a delegate to the First Continental Congress, advocating for unified colonial resistance. His legal acumen and commitment to liberty made him a key figure in drafting petitions and resolutions. In 1776, as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress, Ross proudly signed the Declaration of Independence.

A staunch patriot, Ross served on Pennsylvania's Committee of Safety, organizing defenses during the Revolutionary War. He also held the rank of colonel in the Pennsylvania militia, contributing to the war effort despite health challenges. In 1779, Ross was appointed to the Pennsylvania Court of Admiralty, but his judicial tenure was brief. Stricken by gout, he died later that year at age 49, leaving behind his wife, Ann Lawler, and three children.

Ross's legal expertise and dedication to the Patriot cause helped shape the fledgling nation.

Scan to watch our video about George Ross



James Wilson

James Wilson

1742–1798

PENNSYLVANIA

As the only individual to serve as a Supreme Court Justice and sign both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, James Wilson played a pivotal role in America's founding.

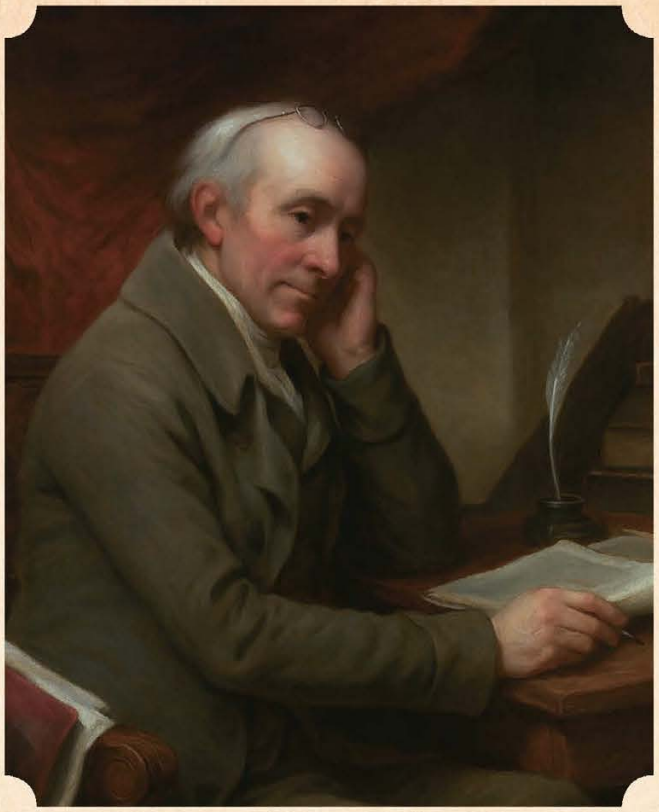
A man from humble beginnings, Wilson was born in Carskerdo, Scotland, in 1742. At age 15, he left to study at the University of St. Andrews, preparing for a life of ministry. However, Wilson took particular interest in the ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment, which shaped his political philosophy early on.

He traveled across the Atlantic in search of a new life of opportunity. When he arrived, he began studying law under prominent attorney John Dickinson. It was not long before Wilson became a distinguished lawyer and known opponent of the Crown. He published a pamphlet in 1774 that influenced the Declaration. In it, he said:

> *"All men are, by nature, equal and free: no one has a right to any authority over another without his consent: all lawful government is founded on the consent of those who are subject to it: such consent was given with a view to endure and to increase the happiness of the governed."*

In addition to shaping and signing the Declaration of Independence, Wilson helped craft the framework of the Constitution, rising to speak more than 140 times. Many scholars consider him one of the most consequential delegates in Philadelphia. He played a critical role in instituting popular sovereignty, a single executive, and the Electoral College. He delivered the first official defense of the Constitution, in which he countered detractors like George Mason and Elbridge Gerry, proclaiming that the Constitution "is the best form of government which has ever been offered to the world." Nearly 250 years later, his prophetic words still ring true.

Scan to watch our video about James Wilson



Dr. Benjamin Rush

Benjamin Rush

1746–1813

PENNSYLVANIA

A physician, an abolitionist, and an early adopter of the cause for independence, Dr. Benjamin Rush was one of the most influential founding fathers.

Born on January 4, 1746, in Byberry Pennsylvania, Rush was raised in a pious Presbyterian family and was educated at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) where he graduated in 1760 at the age of 14. He pursued medicine, apprenticing in Philadelphia and earning his medical degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1768. He returned to Philadelphia in 1769 and established a medical practice. That same year, he became a professor of chemistry at the College of Philadelphia, and in 1770 he published America's first chemistry textbook. Rush's medical contributions were groundbreaking, albeit controversial. He pioneered American psychiatric mental health treatment, and is often referred to as the "father of American psychiatry." Following the Revolutionary War, Rush opened the United States' first free medical clinic, the Philadelphia Dispensary.

Rush was also an early advocate for the education of women and the abolition of slavery. A steadfast patriot, Rush joined the Sons of Liberty and influenced Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, a pivotal pro-independence pamphlet. He was elected to the Continental Congress in 1776 and signed the Declaration of Independence as a representative of Pennsylvania. Rush was not reelected that following year, due to his opposition to the Pennsylvania state constitution, and subsequently accepted the position of Surgeon General in the Middle Department of the Continental Army. Rush was highly critical of the conditions in which soldiers were being treated, and angrily resigned his post in 1778. He briefly supported efforts to remove General George Washington from his post, a stance that cost Rush considerable social and political capital.

However, largely due to his medical and civic contributions, Rush continued to play an important role in American politics. Appointed treasurer of the U.S. Mint by President John Adams, Rush also helped achieve the historic reconciliation between Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

Scan to watch our video about Dr. Benjamin Rush

Signers by State

DELAWARE

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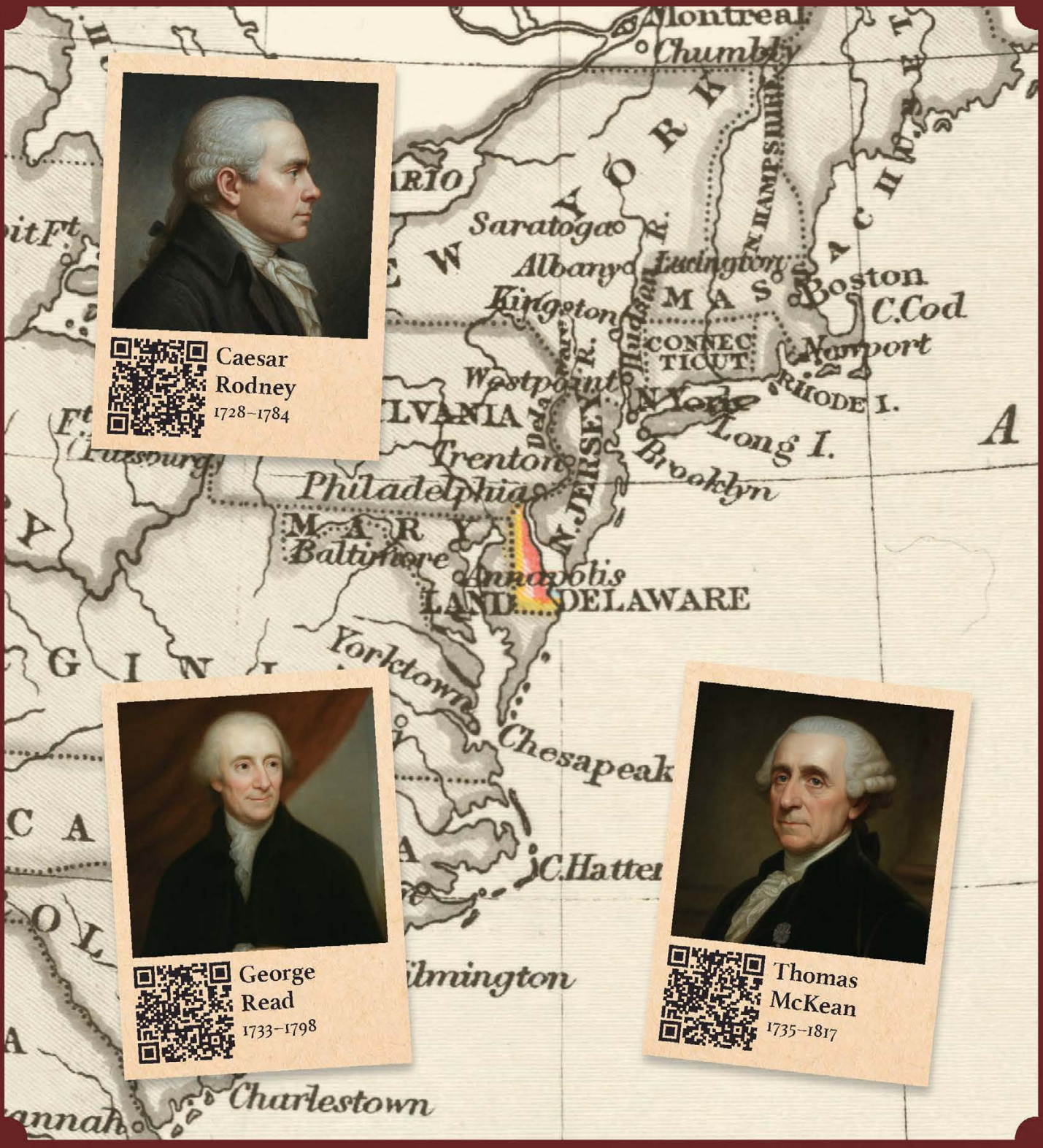

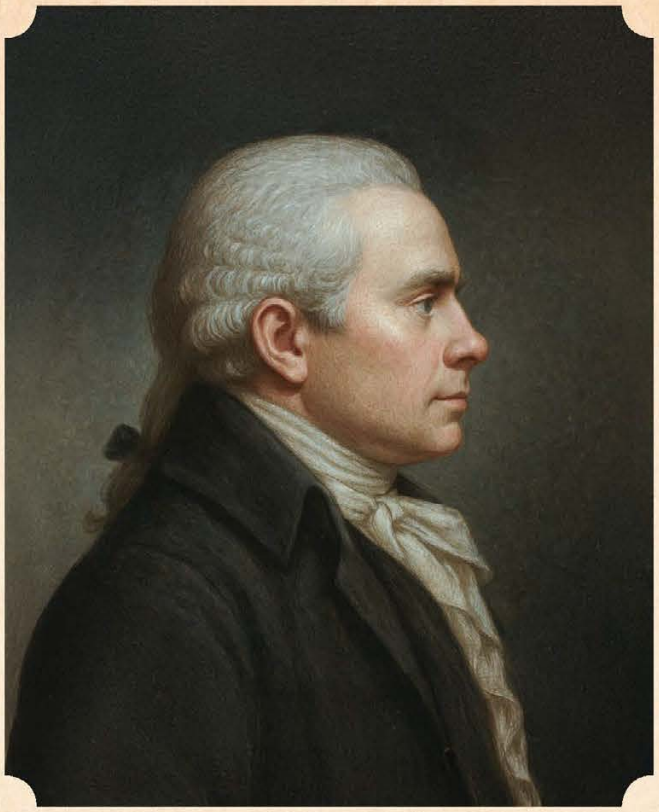

Caesar Rodney

Caesar Rodney

1728–1784

DELAWARE

Caesar Rodney was born October 7, 1728 on a sprawling farm in Kent County, Delaware. After losing his father in his youth, Rodney inherited wealth and responsibility that he used for the good of the new nation.

At 27, Rodney was commissioned High Sheriff of Kent County, Delaware, and he served as an officer in the French and Indian War. Among the many public offices he held, Rodney later joined the Stamp Act Congress and the Continental Congress. No Delawarean since has matched the sheer number of positions held by Rodney and the rigor of his public life. His defining moment came on July 1, 1776, when, despite battling asthma and a disfiguring facial cancer, Rodney rode 80 miles through a thunderstorm and the dead of night from Dover to Philadelphia. Arriving at Independence Hall on July 2, spurs clinking, he broke Delaware's deadlock, casting the decisive vote for the Declaration of Independence. It was an act of duty, courage, and treason that cemented his patriotic legacy.

As wartime governor and major-general, Rodney led Delaware's militia and supported Washington's Continental Army with all the money, supplies, and manpower his state could muster. At a low moment for the Revolutionary cause, he secured military equipment with money from his own pocket. Later, the Continental Congress elected him president of Delaware in 1778, a position he used to stabilize the state's war-torn finances and politics.

As the war came to a close, Rodney's health deteriorated under the strain of cancer. He became too ill to remain in political life, but as a final gesture of respect for Rodney's honorable service to Delaware, the 1783-1784 Legislative Council elected him as speaker. He died on June 26, 1784, leaving behind no children, but rather, a nation shaped by his sacrifice.

Scan to watch our video about Caesar Rodney

George Read

Geo Read

1733–1798

DELAWARE

George Read, born on September 18, 1733, in Cecil County, Maryland, was a self-made lawyer and patriot who helped shape the foundation of American government. He studied law at an early age and, by 21, established a legal practice in Delaware, quickly becoming one of the colony's most respected attorneys.

In 1763, at 29, Read was appointed Attorney General for Lower Delaware by the British Crown, a position he held for over a decade. Though loyal to the law, Read hoped to resolve colonial grievances without war, and initially sought reconciliation with Britain.

In 1774, Read left his post to join the Continental Congress, continuing to advocate for compromise. However, as the push for independence became unavoidable, he signed the Declaration of Independence. In retaliation, British forces ransacked his home and captured his wife.

Recognized for his contributions, Read was selected to draft Delaware's first constitution, and is considered by some to be "the father" of Delaware. In 1777, he served as acting governor when the British captured his predecessor. A decade later, Read led Delaware's delegation at the Constitutional Convention, where he strongly supported small state interests. After securing those rights, he urged Delaware to become the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

Read continued his public service as a U.S. Senator and later as chief justice of Delaware, a role he held until his death on September 21, 1798.

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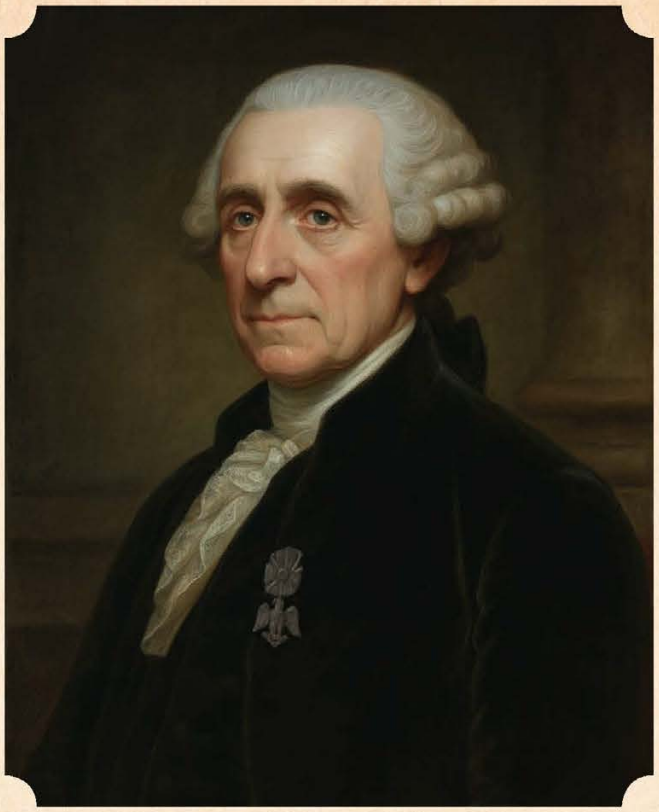
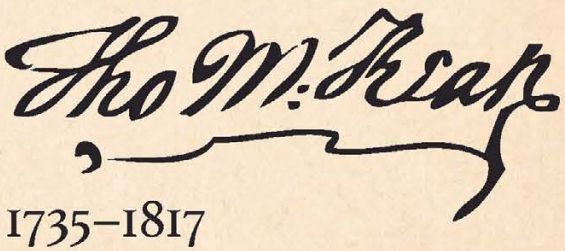


Thomas McKean



1735–1817

DELAWARE

Thomas McKean was a lifelong public servant, statesman, and jurist who helped shape early American government.

He was born on March 19, 1734, in Chester County, Pennsylvania, the son of an innkeeper and farmer. Though a Pennsylvanian by birth, McKean studied and practiced law in Delaware, where he held a number of public offices, including deputy attorney general, justice of the peace, and speaker of the colonial assembly.

In 1765, McKean represented Delaware at the Stamp Act Congress, opposing British economic policies. He later helped dissolve British control in Delaware and was elected to the Continental Congress, where he, along with Caesar Rodney, ensured Delaware supported independence.

McKean uniquely held office in both Delaware and Pennsylvania simultaneously and contributed to both states' constitutions. In 1777, he became chief justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, serving for 22 years.

He also served as a colonel during the Revolutionary War, became president of the Continental Congress, and signed the Articles of Confederation. After the war, McKean helped secure Pennsylvania's ratification of the U.S. Constitution. As a judge, he supported the principle of judicial review well before it was nationally established.

McKean later served three terms as governor of Pennsylvania, surviving political opposition and an attempted impeachment. At age 80, he helped organize a citizens group to defend Philadelphia during the War of 1812.

Thomas McKean died of natural causes in 1817.

Scan to watch our video about Thomas McKean

Signers by State

NORTH CAROLINA

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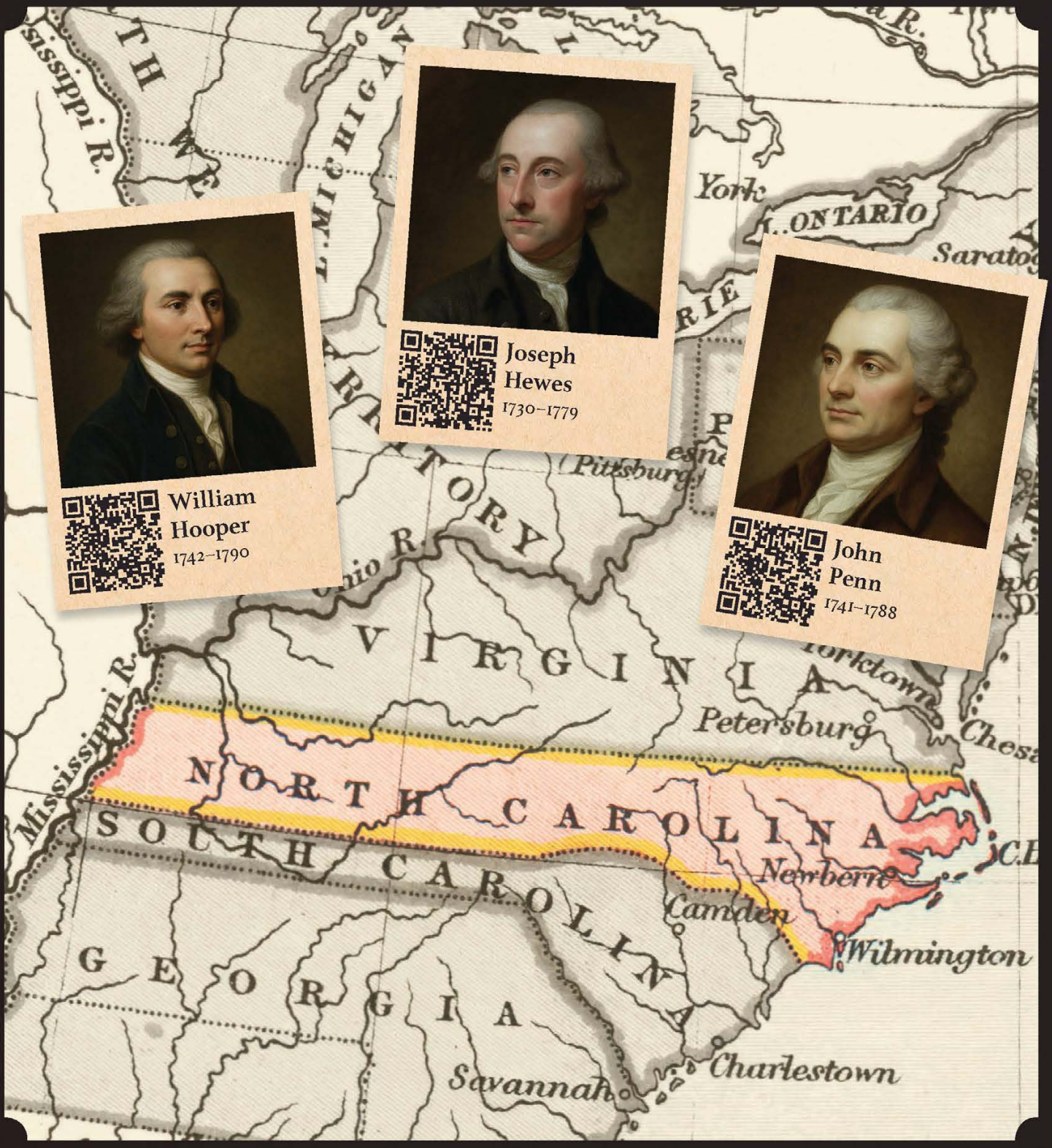
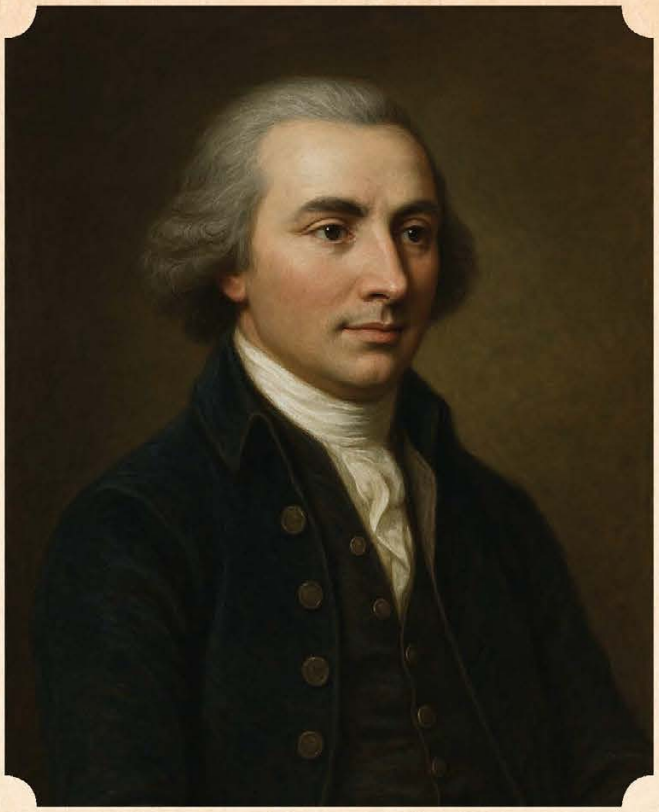
Explore the biography of each signer in more detail in the following pages.





William Hooper

Wm Hooper

1742–1790

NORTH CAROLINA

William Hooper, born in June 1742 in Boston, Massachusetts, was a reluctant revolutionary. Raised by devoutly religious parents, his upbringing often placed him at odds with the growing revolutionary sentiment.

After attending Boston Latin School, Hooper graduated from Harvard in 1760. Though initially steered toward the clergy, he chose to pursue law. He later moved to North Carolina, married, and built a successful legal practice in Wilmington. In 1770, he was appointed deputy attorney general of North Carolina, defending Loyalist policies and British authority.

According to legend, Hooper was dragged through the streets of Hillsborough in 1770 by protesters angered over corrupt British rule—a sign of his loyalty to the Crown. Hooper even advised the British governor to stamp out rebellion.

Hooper's views shifted after the Boston Port Act closed the harbor in retaliation for the Boston Tea Party. As a member of the North Carolina General Assembly, he began advocating for colonial rights, famously writing to a friend, "The Colonies are striding fast to independence, and ere long will build an empire upon the ruins of Great Britain..." Hooper was elected to the Continental Congress in 1774.

Nicknamed the "Prophet of Independence," Hooper was among the first to foresee a complete break from Britain. During the war, his home was burned to the ground by the British, he was separated from his family for nearly a year, and he contracted malaria. After the war, Hooper resumed his law practice and advocated for fair treatment of British Loyalists. He died on October 14, 1790, at the age of 48.

Scan to watch our video about William Hooper

Joseph Hewes

Joseph Hewes,

1730–1779

NORTH CAROLINA

Joseph Hewes, one of three North Carolinians to sign the Declaration of Independence, advanced the Revolution through his invaluable support of the burgeoning American Navy. He invested his own wealth, leveraged his business network, and sacrificed personal profit to serve the cause of liberty.

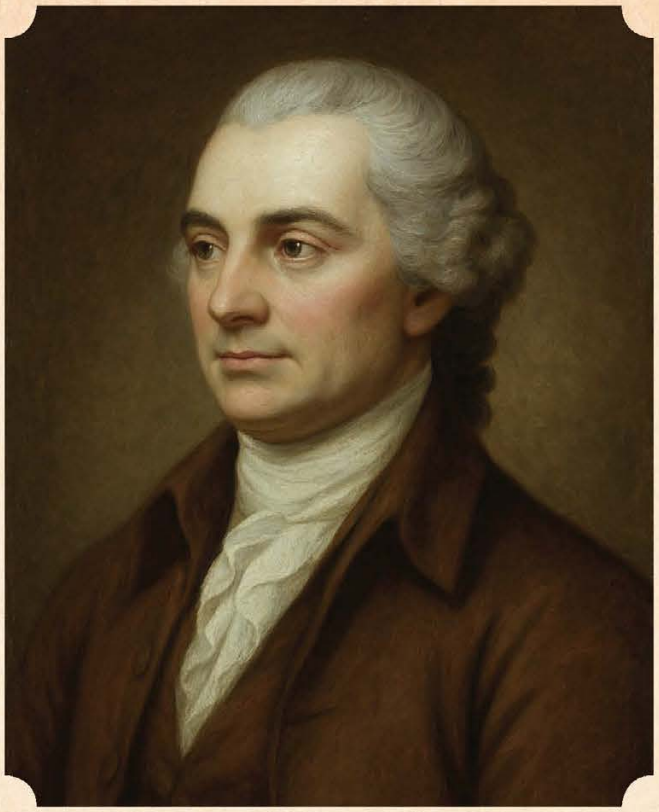
Born on January 23, 1730, near Princeton, New Jersey, Hewes grew up in a Quaker family. He received a strict religious upbringing and a standard public education. Sometime around 1750, Hewes moved to Philadelphia to gain experience in the fields of shipping and businesses. There, he served as an apprentice to a successful merchant and importer, Joseph Ogden.

In 1760, Hewes moved to North Carolina, where he built numerous prosperous mercantile businesses. After partnering with Robert Smith, a lawyer friend, he expanded his enterprise and bought a wharf complete with a small fleet. Hewes became engaged, but his fiancée died before their wedding, and he remained a bachelor for the rest of his life.

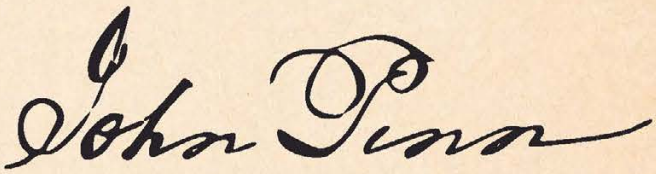
Three years after his arrival in Edenton, North Carolina, the community elected Hewes as a member of the Assembly of North Carolina where he served from 1766 to 1775. There, he helped prepare the "Halifax Resolves," a report he later presented to the Continental Congress. He was also involved in drafting the "Olive Branch Petition," carefully outlined grievances against Britain and justified severing ties with the mother country. King George rejected it immediately.

In 1775, North Carolina elected Hewes to the Second Continental Congress where he served as a member of the committee of claims, helped lay the foundations of the Navy, and sat on the committee to prepare the Articles of Confederation. After a long illness, Hewes died on November 10, 1779.

Scan to watch our video about Joseph Hewes



John Penn



1741–1788

NORTH CAROLINA

John Penn, born May 17, 1741, in Caroline County, Virginia, emerged from an upbringing of little formal education to eventually become one of just 56 men to etch his name on the Declaration of Independence.

After his father died in 1759, Penn discovered a newfound motivation to educate himself and through the aid of his uncle pursued legal studies. In 1762, Penn became licensed to practice law in Virginia, where he worked until the cause of the American Revolution called him to enter public life.

After moving to North Carolina, Penn's fiery opposition to the Stamp Act ignited his political ascent. By 1775, Penn was on his way to the Second Continental Congress. Upon his arrival, Penn declared, "My first wish is for America to be free."

In Philadelphia, Penn's uncompromising passion sparked clashes with his colleagues, notably Continental Congress president Henry Laurens. According to some historians, the two men nearly dueled in a vacant Philadelphia lot, but decided to make peace on the way there.

Penn signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation, making his name one of 16 that both documents bear.

Later, as one of three men on the Board of War for North Carolina, Penn bolstered General Nathaniel Greene against the weakening Cornwallis campaign, forcing the British retreat through North Carolina to Yorktown that won the war.

When America needed Penn most, no sacrifice was too great for independence.

Scan to watch our video about John Penn

Signers by State

MARYLAND

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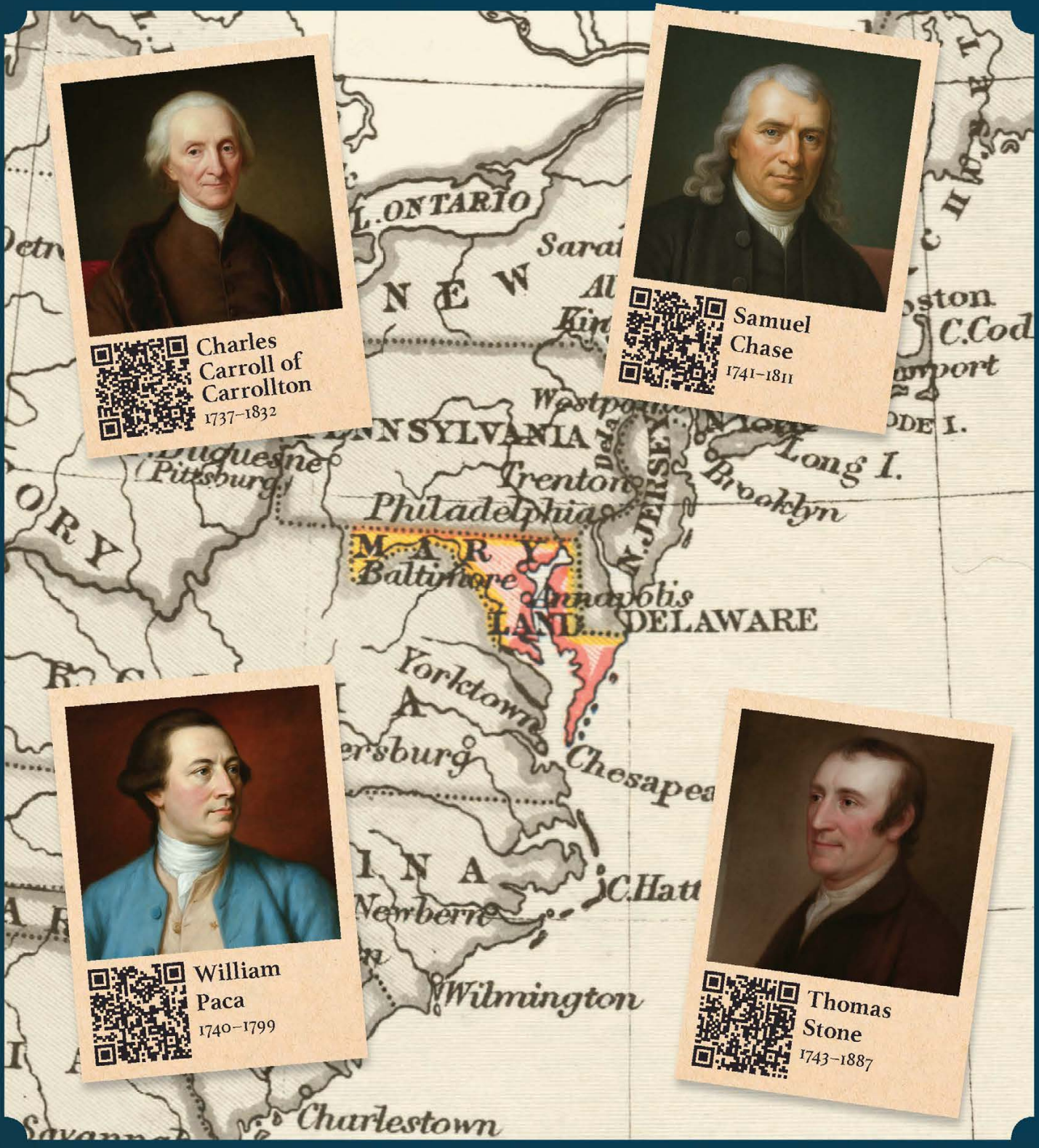

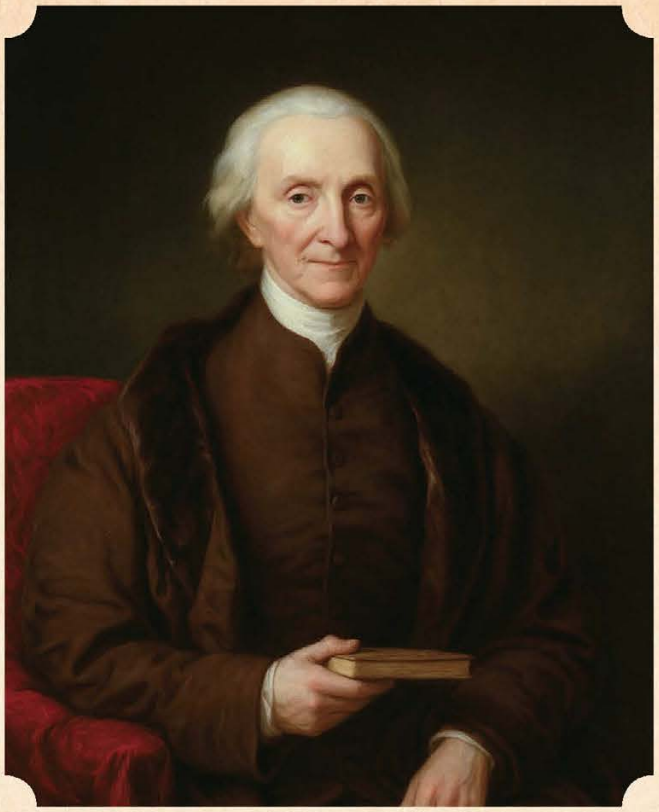

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

1737–1832

MARYLAND

Charles Carroll of Carrollton was the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. Born on September 19, 1737, in Annapolis, Maryland, Carroll was one of the wealthiest and most educated men in the colonies. He was a powerful voice for freedom, religious liberty, and Maryland's place in the new nation.

Educated in Europe in liberal arts and civic law, Carroll returned to Maryland at age 28, only to find himself barred from public office due to his Catholic faith. This did not prevent Carroll from amassing a fortune through agricultural estates and financing new businesses. He was reportedly worth $375 million in today's dollars. His family had long hoped Maryland would one day serve as a haven for persecuted Catholics—a vision Carroll helped bring to life through steadfast service and sacrifice.

In 1773, Carroll rose to prominence as a public advocate for colonial rights, writing under the pseudonym "First Citizen" in the *Maryland Gazette*. He played a crucial role in securing Maryland's resolution for independence and served in the Second Continental Congress, where he risked his life and fortune to sign the Declaration of Independence. As one spectator is said to have remarked after Carroll signed onto the Declaration, "There go a few millions."

Carroll was a major financier of the Revolution. He helped draft the Maryland Constitution and was instrumental in the state's ratification of the U.S. Constitution. From 1789 to 1792, he served as Maryland's first U.S. senator.

Devoted to God, family, and country, Charles Carroll lived to the remarkable age of 95, dying on November 14, 1832, as the longest-living and last surviving signer of the Declaration.

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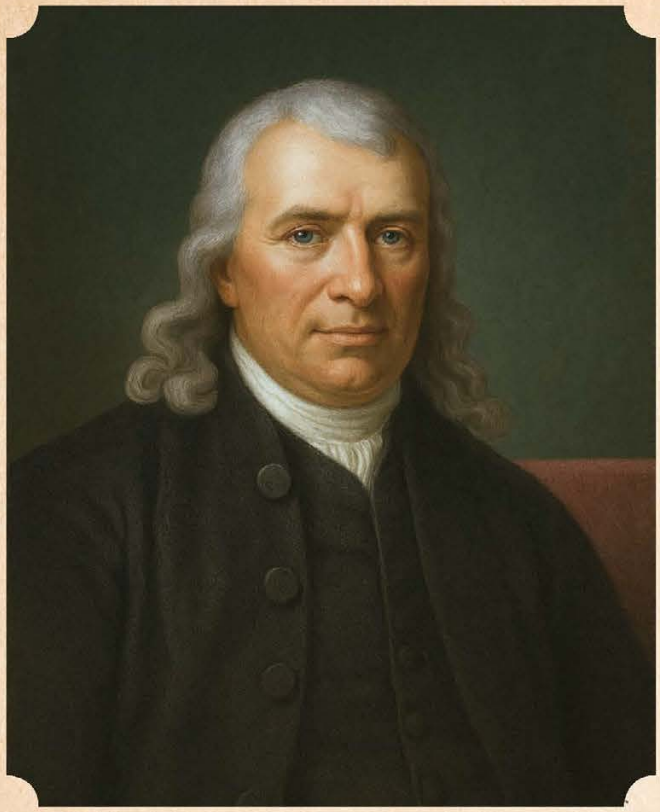

Samuel Chase

Samuel Chase

1741–1811

MARYLAND

Samuel Chase, one of the nation's first major legal figures, played a key role in the early formation of the American Republic and its legal system.

Born on April 17, 1741, near Princess Anne, Maryland, Chase was the only child of Thomas Chase, an Anglican minister, and Matilda Walker. Educated at home, he studied law in Annapolis and was admitted to the bar in 1761 at age 20. He became known for representing middle-class clients, often pro bono, and quickly built a strong reputation as a lawyer.

At 23, Chase was elected to the Maryland General Assembly, where he served from 1764 to 1784. He became a vocal opponent of British rule, particularly following Parliament's imposition of the Stamp Act in 1765. He served in the first and second Continental Congresses, where he joined Benjamin Franklin and Charles Carroll on a trip to persuade the Canadians to join the American Revolution. The attempt was unsuccessful.

After the war, Chase continued his legal career and in 1796 President George Washington appointed him a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. A committed Federalist, Chase's political views on the bench drew criticism, and in 1804, he was impeached by the House of Representatives under the leadership of President Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party.

Chase was charged with eight counts, including refusing to dismiss biased jurors and promoting political opinions from the bench. The Senate acquitted him on all counts, with several senators voting against his impeachment despite party affiliation. The impeachment trial set precedents on the need for judges to refrain from advancing partisan politics from the bench, and it also further enshrined the independent nature of the judiciary. Chase remained on the Supreme Court until his death on June 19, 1811.

Scan to watch our video about Samuel Chase

William Paca

Wm Paca

1740–1799
MARYLAND

A respected lawyer, jurist, and public servant, William Paca was known for his quiet, razor-sharp logic and strategy—and his impact on Maryland politics before, during, and after the War for Independence.

Born in 1740 near Abingdon, Maryland to a wealthy planter, Paca later attended Philadelphia College—today the University of Pennsylvania. Upon graduation, he studied law in Annapolis. In 1761, Paca began practicing law in local courts. As British oppression against the colonies grew, he helped form the "Sons of Liberty," and in 1767, aligning himself with the party resisting the British Stamp Act, was elected to the Lower House of the Maryland Assembly.

Later, Paca organized local committees to oppose the Boston Port Act—the first in a series of "Intolerable Acts," which closed the Boston port and ordered the city to pay a large fine for the Boston Tea Party. Paca was sent as a Delegate to the First Continental Congress, where he helped craft resolutions and petitions. While the Maryland Convention—still loyal to the crown as late as June 1776—initially barred Paca from voting for independence, they reversed course by July, and Paca proudly voted in the affirmative.

During the war, Paca served on Congress' newly created Court of Appeals. In 1782, he became governor and was an early advocate of supporting veterans returning from war. In 1786, as a Maryland House delegate, Paca became a leader of the Antifederalist movement. His primary objections to the Constitution– that there were inadequate safeguards for freedom of religion, press, and legal protection for those accused of crimes—were later incorporated into the Bill of Rights.

For the last ten years of his life, Paca served on the Federal District Court for Maryland until his death in 1799.

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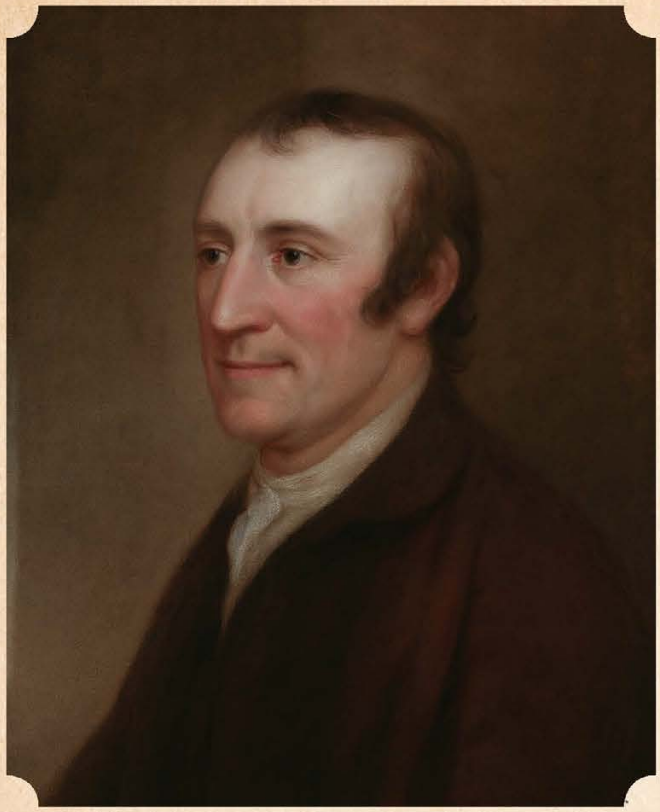

Thomas Stone

Thos: Stone

1743–1887

MARYLAND

Thomas Stone was born in 1743, in Charles County, Maryland, to a wealthy planter family. After completing preparatory studies in classics, he pursued law in Annapolis under Thomas Johnson, who would become Maryland's first state governor.

Admitted to the Maryland bar in 1764, Stone opened a practice in Frederick, Maryland. His political career began in 1774, when he was elected from Charles County to the first Maryland Convention. Stone was initially cautious on the question of independence, even as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress, expressing in April 1776 his "wish to conduct affairs so that a just and honorable reconciliation should take place, or that we should be pretty unanimous in a resolution to fight it out for Independence. The proper way to effect this is not to move too quick."

Of course, a near unanimous "resolution to fight" did pass, and Stone signed his name for the cause of independence. He then served as a Maryland state senator. While in the Congress, he was a member of the committee that framed the Articles of Confederation in 1777.

In 1787, he was elected to attend the Constitutional Convention, but declined due to his wife's failing health. Margaret Stone died in June that year, and Stone soon followed on October 5, 1787, in Alexandria, Virginia, at the age of 44, succumbing to what many believed was a devastating heartbreak.

Scan to watch our video about Thomas Stone

Signers by State

SOUTH CAROLINA

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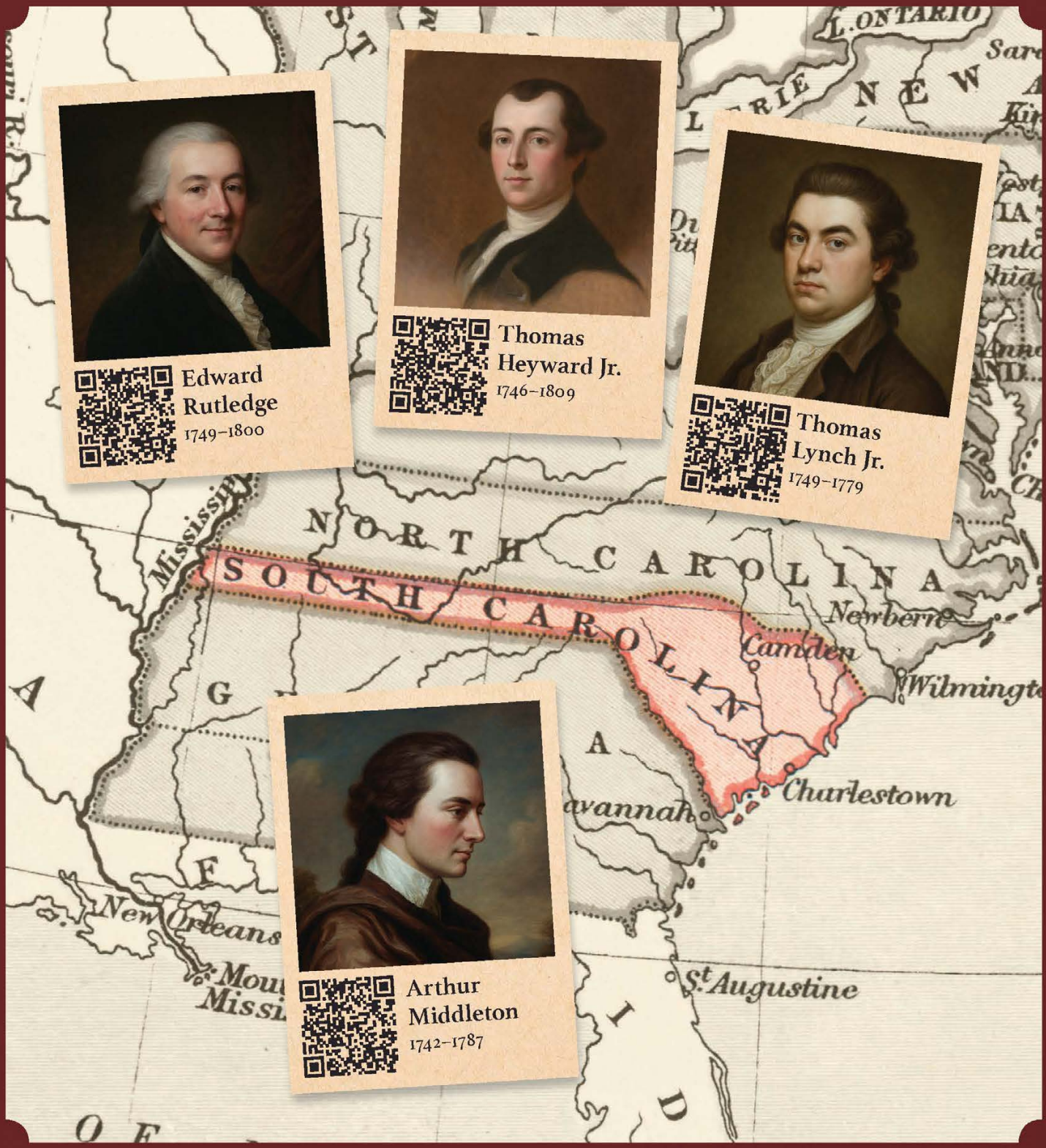

Edward Rutledge

Edward Rutledge J.

1749–1800

SOUTH CAROLINA

Edward Rutledge, born in Charleston, South Carolina, was the youngest signer of the Declaration of Independence. The son of Dr. John Rutledge, an Irish immigrant and physician, and Sarah Hext, a wealthy South Carolinian, Rutledge grew up in an aristocratic family.

Rutledge studied law in England and was admitted to the English bar in 1772 before returning to Charleston, where he established a thriving legal practice. In 1774, he married the sister of Arthur Middleton, a fellow signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Rutledge's political career began in 1774 when, at the age of 24, he was elected to the first Continental Congress to represent South Carolina alongside his brother, John.

Initially, Rutledge favored reconciliation with Britain. However, he ultimately supported the Declaration of Independence, reportedly persuading the South Carolina delegation to vote in the affirmative.

A proud American patriot, Rutledge served as a captain in the Charleston Artillery Battalion during the Revolutionary War. He was captured by the British during the 1780 Siege of Charleston and was imprisoned until a prisoner exchange in July 1781.

After the war, Rutledge returned home to South Carolina, serving in the state legislature from 1782-1798. Here Rutledge fought against opening the African slave trade and voted to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

Elected governor in 1798, Rutledge died in office at the age of 50.

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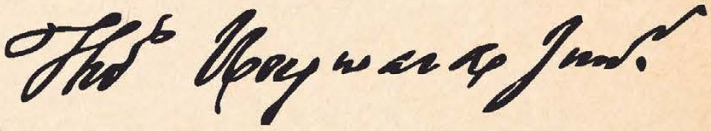
Thomas Heyward Jr.



1746–1809

SOUTH CAROLINA

Thomas Heyward Jr. was born on July 28, 1746, at his family's estate in St. Luke's Parish, South Carolina. His father, Colonel Daniel Heyward, was a successful planter and businessman. Raised in a politically engaged household, Heyward received a legal education at Middle Temple in London, where he developed a strong understanding of governance and became critical of the Crown.

Upon returning to South Carolina, Heyward joined the revolutionary movement and became an active voice for independence. In 1776, he was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence.

During the war, Heyward served as a captain of artillery in the South Carolina Militia and was wounded at the Battle of Beaufort. He was later captured by British forces at the Siege of Charleston and held as a prisoner of war in St. Augustine, Florida, until his release in 1781. During his imprisonment, he wrote a parody of "God Save the King" which would be later known as "God Save the Thirteen States."

After the war, Heyward contributed to rebuilding civic life in South Carolina. He helped found the South Carolina Agricultural Society and served as its first president in 1785. He retired from public life in 1799 and died on April 17, 1809, at the age of 63.

Scan to watch our video about Thomas Heyward Jr.

Thomas Lynch Jr.

Thomas Lynch Junr

1749–1779

SOUTH CAROLINA

Thomas Lynch Jr. was a scholar, legislator, farmer, soldier, and patriot, who gave his life and family to the cause of American independence. He was the second-youngest signer of the Declaration of Independence and did not live to see the end of the Revolution.

Born on August 5, 1749, in Prince George's Parish, South Carolina, Lynch was the son of a wealthy rice planter. He was educated in England, where he attended Eton College, Cambridge University, and later studied law at Middle Temple in London.

After returning to South Carolina, Lynch became a planter and married Elizabeth Shubrick. Following his father into revolutionary politics, he became a vocal advocate for independence and served in South Carolina's first and second provincial congresses, helping draft the state's first constitution.

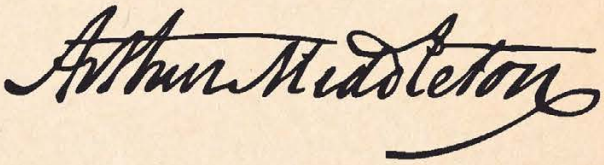
He also served as a captain in the South Carolina regiment, raising a company of troops before illness forced him to step down. While recovering, Lynch learned his father had suffered a severe stroke while serving in the Continental Congress. Lynch traveled to Philadelphia to assist and assume his father's seat, making them the only father and son to serve concurrently in the Congress.

Lynch signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and reportedly left space on the parchment for his father, who died en route home.

Lynch's health continued to decline, forcing him to withdraw from public life. In 1779, he and his wife sailed abroad seeking treatment but were never seen again—presumed lost in a shipwreck. He was 30 years old, the youngest signer of the Declaration to die.

Scan to watch our video about Thomas Lynch Jr.

Arthur Middleton



1742–1787

SOUTH CAROLINA

Arthur Middleton was a South Carolinian patriot who fiercely defended his colony's interests and supported radical measures against British rule. He was one of a handful of signers of the Declaration of Independence to become a prisoner of war.

Born on June 26, 1742, near Charleston, South Carolina, Middleton was the son of a powerful plantation owner who later served in the Continental Congress. At age 12, Middleton began his education in England, graduating from St. John's College (Cambridge) and studying law at Middle Temple in London.

After returning to South Carolina, he managed a rice plantation, became a justice of the peace, and served in the provincial House of Commons. By 1775, Middleton was a strong critic of British authority, advocating for harsh measures against Loyalists and helping to organize military defense as part of the Council of Safety. He contributed to drafting South Carolina's constitution and co-designed the state's official seal.

When his father became ill, Middleton replaced him in the Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence and supported additional military aid to the South. He later returned to South Carolina and fought in the Battle of Charleston, where he was captured by British forces and held for a year.

After his release, Middleton rejoined the Continental Congress, where he strongly advocated for punitive actions against British military leaders, including Lord Cornwallis. Following the war, he rebuilt his damaged plantation, served in the state legislature, and became a trustee of the College of Charleston.

Scan to watch our video about Arthur Middleton

Signers by State

GEORGIA

Scan the QR codes to video profiles and White House exhibit photos.
Explore the biography of each signer in more detail in the following pages.

Button Gwinnett
1735–1777

Lyman Hall
1724–1790

George Walton
1741–1804

Button Gwinnett

Button Gwinnett

1735–1777

GEORGIA

Button Gwinnet was born in 1735 in Gloucestershire, England, to Anne and the Reverend Samuel Gwinnett, a minister in the Church of England. After Gwinnett married and had three children, he sailed to Georgia in 1765 in search of better business opportunities.

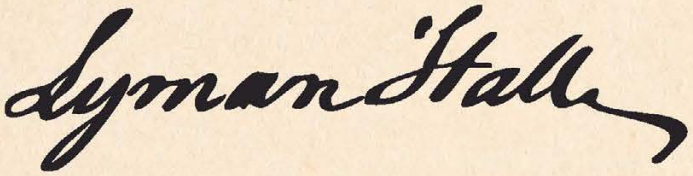
After struggles with his merchant business, Gwinnett purchased St. Catherine's Island off the coast of Georgia, near the booming port of Sunbury, where he became a planter. Gwinnett also became active in local Georgia politics, and was elected to the Commons House of Assembly in 1769. After personal and financial struggles, Gwinnett stepped back from the political scene. But when tensions rose with England, he re-entered the political arena and united coastal and rural dissidents. He was elected commander of Georgia's Continental Battalion.

After signing the Declaration, Gwinnett returned to Georgia, where he was elected speaker of the state assembly and helped draft the state's first constitution. He was also appointed the provisional president and commander-in-chief of Georgia, where he was responsible for the unsuccessful invasion of British East Florida.

The backlash from this failed invasion escalated a longstanding feud between Gwinnett and General Lachlan McIntosh, who offered a scathing criticism of Gwinnett's handling of the invasion, calling him a "scoundrel and lying rascal." These derogatory comments prompted an outraged Gwinnett to challenge McIntosh to a duel, and on the morning of May 16, 1777, the two men met in Sir James Wright's Pasture, and standing just 12 feet apart, fired shots at each other. While both were hit, only Gwinnett's wound would prove to be fatal. He died three days later.

Scan to watch our video about Button Gwinnett

Lyman Hall



1724–1790

GEORGIA

Lyman Hall was born in Wallingford, Connecticut, on April 12, 1724, as the fourth of eight children. He pursued his studies at Yale College, from where he graduated in 1747.

He became an ordained Congregational minister, but soon pursued a career in medicine, receiving the degree of Doctor of Medicine. His first wife, Abigail Burr, died just a year after their marriage, and in 1753, Hall married Mary Osborn, and they had one son.

In the late 1750s, Hall moved to Georgia, and he became a leading physician in the area. This reputation, along with his charisma, made him a popular and well-established figure among those living in St. John's Parish. When tensions began to rise against the king, Hall expressed his discontent with the monarch, and soon became a spokesman for the Puritan discontent against the crown.

He was elected to the Second Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence—one of four practicing physicians to do so. In January 1783, Hall was elected governor of Georgia, where he had to address an onslaught of crises, including frontier problems with the Loyalists and Native Americans. He also played a crucial role in establishing the University of Georgia.

After serving as Governor, he moved to Burke Country in 1790, where he died on October 19 of that year, at the age of 66.

Scan to watch our video about Lyman Hall

George Walton

1741–1804

GEORGIA

George Walton was born in Virginia and orphaned as a young child. Raised by an uncle with thirteen children, Walton taught himself by firelight at night while apprenticing as a carpenter. In 1769, he moved to Savannah, Georgia, where he studied law and joined the bar in 1774.

That year, Walton helped organize Georgia's revolutionary movement, assembling at Tondee's Tavern in Savannah to denounce the Intolerable Acts. These meetings led to the first Georgia Provincial Congress in January 1775, followed by a second in July, where Walton served and rose in the Georgia militia.

In 1776, Walton was appointed a delegate to the Continental Congress. Though he arrived after much debate, he heard John Adams' speech and later wrote, "Since the 1st day of July, 1776, my conduct... has corresponded with the result of that great question which you so ably and faithfully developed on that day..."

Walton was commissioned a colonel in 1778 and was injured and captured during the Siege of Savannah. After his release in 1779, he was elected governor of Georgia, though he served briefly before returning to Congress.

In 1783, Walton became chief justice of Georgia, later serving another term as governor in 1789, during which he helped adopt a new state constitution. Though invited to attend the Federal Constitutional Convention in 1787, he declined. He later served as a state superior court justice and briefly served in the U.S. Senate.

George Walton died in Augusta, Georgia, in 1804.

Scan to watch our video about George Walton

Women of the Revolution

The women of the American Revolution played crucial roles as spies, messengers, fundraisers, and even battlefield supporters, often risking their lives for the cause of liberty. Figures like Abigail Adams, Phillis Wheatley, and Mercy Otis Warren challenged traditional roles, and helped lay the groundwork for the future of the United States. Their courage, resilience, and patriotism were vital to the fight for independence and the shaping of a new nation.

Meet the women of the Revolution:

Explore their extended biographies.
Scan the QR codes to see video profiles and White House exhibit photos.

Abigail Adams ..... p. 108
Betsy Ross ..... p. 109
Dolley Madison ..... p. 110
Phillis Wheatley ..... p. 111
Martha Washington ..... p. 112
Mercy Otis Warren ..... p. 113

Abigail Adams

1744–1818

Advisor, writer, and trailblazer, Abigail Adams famously wrote to her husband John Adams to "remember the Ladies" as the Continental Congress gathered in 1776. She continued, "Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could."

Abigail was born on November 22, 1744, in Massachusetts. She had no formal education, but was a voracious reader, and took advantage of her family's library to master topics such as Shakespeare, philosophy, and ancient history.

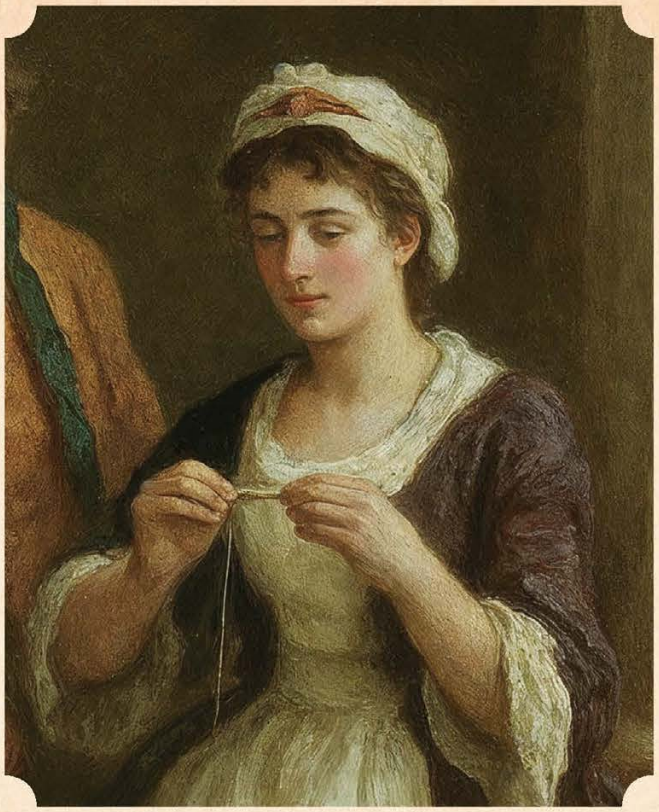
In 1762, she met a young lawyer, John Adams, who shared her intellectual interests. They married and had five children, including the future sixth president, John Quincy Adams.

Leading up to the Revolutionary War, John Adams was frequently away—and it was during this period that Abigail and John cultivated a lifelong correspondence. She gave her thoughts on everything from updates on the children to the need for colonial America to abolish slavery. She also ran the farm and the finances in Adam's absence, keeping the family afloat through her thriftiness.

When John Adams became vice president and then second president of the United States in 1797, Abigail often joined him in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, taking on hostess duties.

The Adams family became the first "First Family" to live in the White House, and Abigail continued to advise her husband on political affairs. In fact, some called her "Mrs. President," suggesting she might have had too much influence. When John Adams lost reelection in 1800, they moved to Quincy, Massachusetts, and Abigail devoted herself to her family and son's political career. She also resumed correspondence with Jefferson, though his political rivalry with her husband had pained her. In 1818, Abigail Adams died of typhoid fever, but her letters and legacy have forever shaped the American story.

Scan to watch our video about Abigail Adams



Betsy Ross

1752–1836

Betsy Ross is credited with stitching the first United States flag—a symbol of freedom that has since become the marker of American identity, patriotism, and pride.

Born Elizabeth Griscom on January 1, 1752, in Gloucester City, New Jersey, Betsy Ross was the eighth of seventeen children (though only nine survived into adulthood) and was raised by a Quaker family in Philadelphia. After schooling, she apprenticed under John Webster, becoming a skilled seamstress and upholsterer. In 1773, she eloped with John Ross, which got her expelled from the Quaker community, since they did not approve of Betsy marrying a non-Quaker. Together, they ran an upholstery shop in Philadelphia, but John tragically died in 1776.

A widow at 24, Betsy continued running the shop—and according to legend, General George Washington, Robert Morris, and George Ross visited her in the summer of 1776. Washington showed her a sketch of a flag with thirteen red and white stripes and thirteen six-pointed stars and Betsy advised minor changes. This legend was made famous by her grandson William Canby in 1870 to the Pennsylvania Historical Society, and while there is no definitive evidence, Betsy and the American flag are now inextricably linked. Throughout the Revolutionary War, and for decades after, Betsy continued to make flags—many through government contracts. In 1811, for example, Betsy made over 50 garrison flags for the US arsenal on the Schuylkill River.

In 1777, Betsy married a merchant sailor, Joseph Ashburn, and they had two daughters, but Joseph was captured by a British warship and died in a British prison in 1782. John Claypoole, a fellow Patriot who had been imprisoned with Joseph, visited Betsy to bring her the news that her husband had died. Over the course of the year, Betsy and John fell in love. They married and had five daughters , enjoying 34 years of marriage before John's death in 1817. Betsy retired at the age of 76, completely blind, and died peacefully on January 30, 1836, shortly after her 84th birthday.

Scan to watch our video about Betsy Ross

Dolley Madison

1768–1849

Dolley Madison, the fourth First Lady and wife of President James Madison, was known for her influence, determination, and energetic presence. A frequent entertainer, she helped shape the role of the First Lady from the earliest days of the presidency.

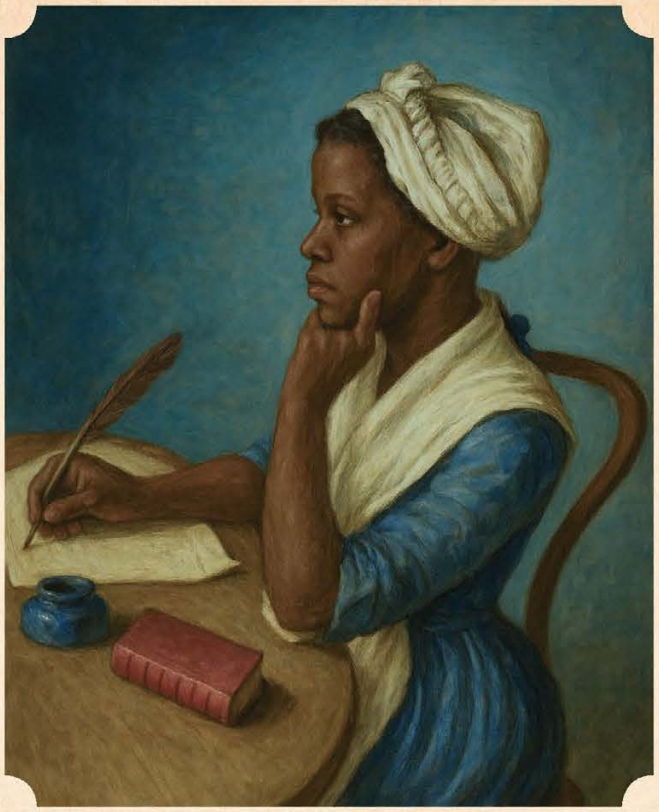
Born in 1768 in North Carolina, Dolley Madison was raised in a Quaker family in both Virginia and Philadelphia. In 1790, she married John Todd Jr., a lawyer—though tragically, her husband and baby son died of yellow fever in 1793. She and her only remaining son, John, survived. One year later, when she was 26, Dolley married James Madison, who was 17 years her senior. In 1801, when Madison was appointed by President Thomas Jefferson to be Secretary of State, they moved to Washington, D.C. Since Jefferson's wife had died, Dolley helped co-host sophisticated White House events, keeping with the standards of European politicians. She also played a vital role in fundraising for the Lewis and Clark expedition.

When James Madison was elected president in 1808, Dolley began an illustrious tenure as First Lady: sponsoring the first inaugural ball and becoming the first wife of a president to formally associate herself with a public charity project, sponsoring the first ever home for orphaned girls in Washington, D.C. During the War of 1812, the British forces invaded Washington and set the White House on fire on August 24, 1814. Dolley famously ordered the saving of historic documents, silver, and art—including a portrait of George Washington.

Despite her Quaker background, Dolley enjoyed playing cards, dipping snuff, and embracing fashion trends.

When Madison left the presidency, he and Dolley returned to Montpelier. After his death, Dolley returned to Washington, D.C., where she remained a prominent figure in social and political circles and was the first private citizen to send a message through telegraph. In 1849, at age 81, Dolley Madison died.

Scan to watch our video about Dolley Madison



Phillis Wheatley

c. 1753–1784

Groundbreaking poet Phillis Wheatley is considered the first African American woman, and only the third American woman, to publish a book of poems. Wheatley was renowned for her imagination, drive, and courage.

Born around 1753 in Africa, she was kidnapped at age seven and enslaved in Boston, Massachusetts, to the Wheatley family in 1761. She was named after the boat that brought her to the colony, the *Phillis*. The Wheatley family educated her, and within a remarkably short period after her arrival, she had a command of the Bible, Greek, and Latin classics, British Literature, astronomy and geography. A prodigy, Wheatley grew in notoriety in 1770 after she published "An Elegiac Poem, on the Death of the Celebrated George Whitefield."

In 1773, she traveled to London and published her first book of poems: *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. The first book published by an African American, its forward was signed by John Hancock and other Boston leaders—but not without first having to prove she was indeed the author because of her race and presumed illiteracy. Shortly after returning to Boston, she was emancipated.

Wheatley embraced the elegy writing style, her African heritage, religion, and the American Revolution—but believed slavery was a roadblock to true freedom. At one point, she sent George Washington a well-received poem after his appointment as Commander of the Continental Army.

In 1778, Wheatley married John Peters, a free black man, and despite poverty and discrimination, continued writing. She tried to publish her second book, but failed. Because her husband was imprisoned for debt, Wheatley worked as a maid while continuing to write poetry to provide for her family. She had three children, though none survived. Wheatley died of an illness in 1784 at the age of 31.

Scan to watch our video about Phillis Wheatley

Martha Washington

1731–1802

Wife, mother, property owner, and the first "First Lady" of the United States, Martha Washington was known for her personal strength, devotion to her husband, and patient resolve during and after the war.

Born Martha Dandridge on June 2, 1731, she learned to read and write at a time when many women did not. Throughout her life, she read the Bible, novels, magazines, and frequently wrote letters. At age 18, Martha married Daniel Parke Custis, and they had four children, though only two survived infancy. Then, at age 26, Martha became a wealthy widow. In 1759, she married George Washington. She was about five feet tall and he stood over six feet and two inches tall, but she made up for her petite stature through her unflappable spirit.

When General Washington left Mount Vernon for military duties, Martha managed the household expertly. She spent the brutal winters of the Revolutionary War at the front with her husband. In addition to providing invaluable support to him, she mended socks, raised money for supplies, and boosted morale among the troops. Sadly, during this period, Martha lost her last living child, Jack, when he died of camp fever.

After winning the War of Independence, George Washington was elected the first president, and he and Martha began their next chapter of service to the new nation as America's First Couple. Known as "Lady Washington," Martha set important social and political precedents like Friday receptions called "levees" in New York and Philadelphia.

After Washington retired from the presidency, he and Martha returned to Mount Vernon. Two years later, George died, and as her husband had wished, Martha freed his slaves. In 1802, two years later, Martha died. Today, America's First Couple are buried side by side at Mount Vernon.

Scan to watch our video about Martha Washington

Mercy Otis Warren

1728–1814

Known as the "Conscience of the Revolution," and described as perhaps the most formidable female intellectual in eighteenth-century America, Mercy Otis Warren was a poet, historian, and playwright. She believed in the Revolution, and played an integral role in capturing, shaping, and moving the cause forward.

Born in 1728 in Barnstable, Massachusetts, Mercy Otis was the third of thirteen children, and the family's oldest daughter. She grew up in a household where her intellectual and academic pursuits were encouraged, which was unusual for women at the time. She married James Warren, a politician, in 1754, and they had five sons. Defying custom and convention, Warren was openly political, engaging with many great figures and thinkers like John Adams, Abigail Adams, and Samuel Adams.

Patriotic, and writing anonymously, Warren published her satire, The Adulateur (1772), and two other plays, Defeat (1773), and The Group (1775)—each denouncing the British. She supported the Boston Tea Party and boycotts of British goods.

In 1790, using her real name, Warren was the third woman to publish a book of poems, behind Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley. In 1805, Warren also published *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*—a three volume work that comprehensively captured the history leading toward Revolution. This was one of the first nonfiction books published by a woman in America.

She also denounced the institution of slavery because it could "banish a sense of general liberty." And as an Anti-Federalist, she took a strong stand against ratification of the Constitution. At the age of 86, Warren died on October 19, 1814, in Massachusetts—leaving behind a legacy as a bold woman undeterred in telling the truth.

Scan to watch our video about Mercy Otis Warren

Fun Family Activities

Test Your Knowledge

Take our quiz to test your knowledge of the Declaration of Independence and its signers. All of the answers can be found in this book!

p. 116

Who Would You Be In The Revolution?

Ask yourself, if you were alive during the Revolutionary War, what kind of person would you have been?

p. 118–127

Test Your Knowledge

1

Which of these Founding Fathers was NOT a signer?

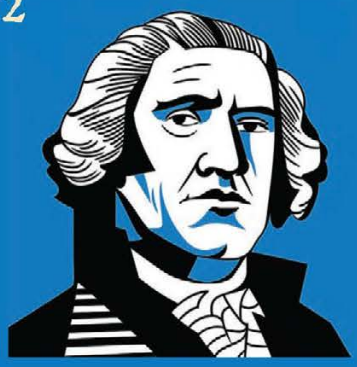
a) Benjamin Franklin

b) George Washington

c) Sam Adams

d) John Adams

2



At 70 years old, this Founding Father was the oldest to sign the Declaration of Independence:

a) William Dawes

b) Increase Mather

c) William Whipple

d) Benjamin Franklin

3

This signer was rumored to be the richest man in Boston:

a) Samuel Adams

b) Thomas Paine

c) John Hancock

d) Paul Revere

4

This signer was suspected of orchestrating the Boston Tea Party:

a) Samuel Adams

b) Francis Lightfoot Lee

c) Caesar Rodney

d) Stephen Hopkins

5

Remarkably, these two Founding Fathers died on the 50th anniversary of their signing of the Declaration of Independence:

a) Roger Sherman and Caesar Rodney

b) Thomas Jefferson and John Adams

c) Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr

d) Paul Revere and William Dawes

6

This signer went on to become the 2nd United States president:

a) Thomas Jefferson

b) Andrew Jackson

c) James Monroe

d) John Adams

7

The signers of the Declaration of Independence met in which American city?

a) Boston, Massachusetts

b) New York, New York

c) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

d) Charleston, South Carolina

8

Which signer is most credited as the Declaration's author?

a) Thomas Jefferson

b) Alexander Hamilton

c) George Washington

d) James Madison

9

How many signers of the Declaration of Independence were there?

a) 13

b) 50

c) 56

d) 5

10

How does the Declaration of Independence begin?

a) "These are the times that try men's souls..."

b) "My country 'tis of thee..."

c) "We the people of the United States of America..."

d) "When in the course of human events..."

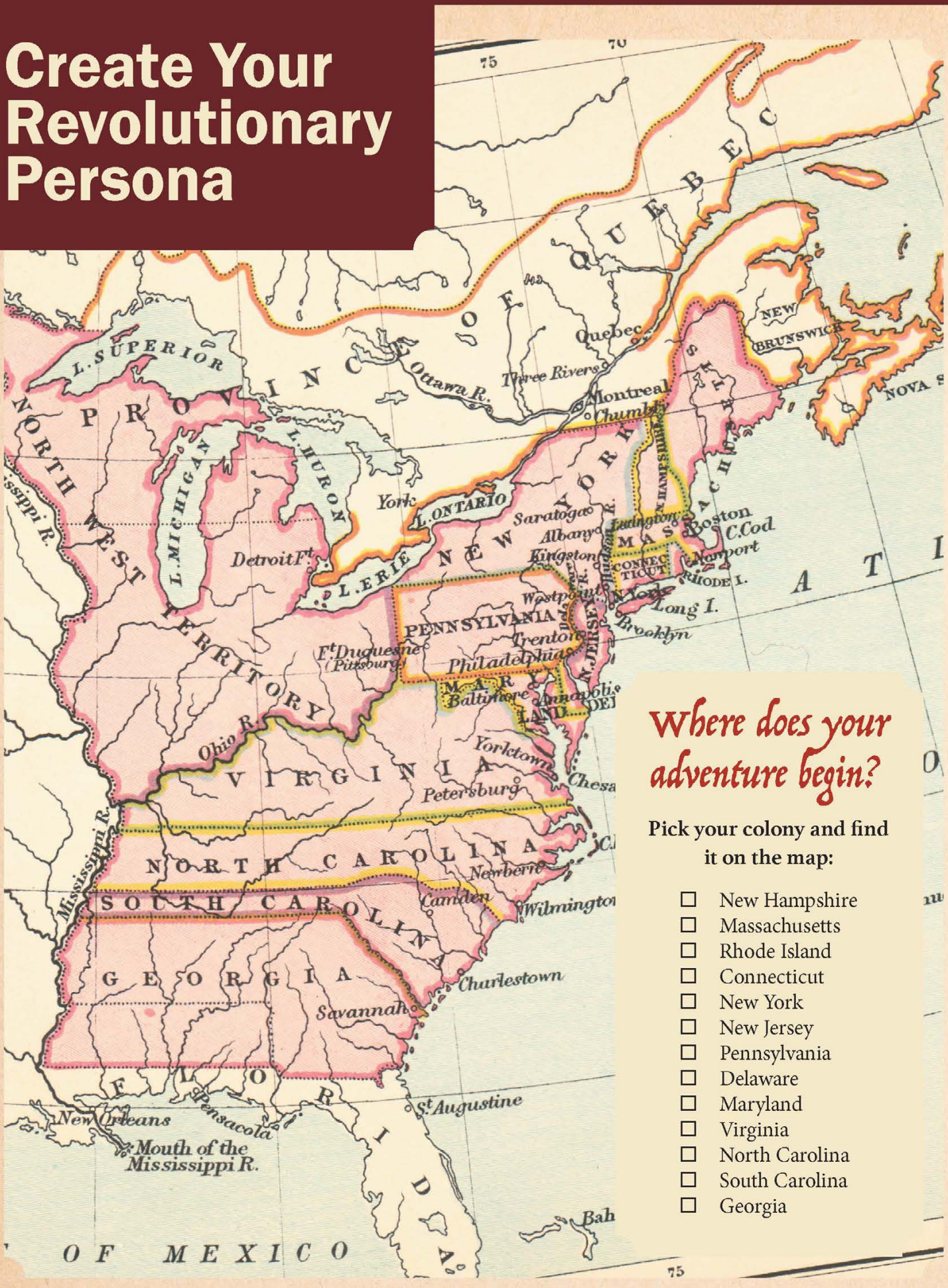
HOW MANY DID YOU GET CORRECT?

10	A *Great Work!*
9	B
5–8	C
1–4	D
0	F

ANSWER KEY:

1: B, 2: D, 3: C, 4: A, 5: B
6: D, 7: C, 8: A, 9: C, 10: D

Create Your Revolutionary Persona



Where does your adventure begin?

Pick your colony and find it on the map:

- ☐ New Hampshire
- ☐ Massachusetts
- ☐ Rhode Island
- ☐ Connecticut
- ☐ New York
- ☐ New Jersey
- ☐ Pennsylvania
- ☐ Delaware
- ☐ Maryland
- ☐ Virginia
- ☐ North Carolina
- ☐ South Carolina
- ☐ Georgia

Pick your portrait.

Cut out a picture of yourself and paste it over one of the personas below:

What's your motto?

Circle the phrase that your character lives by.

"Give me liberty or give me death!"

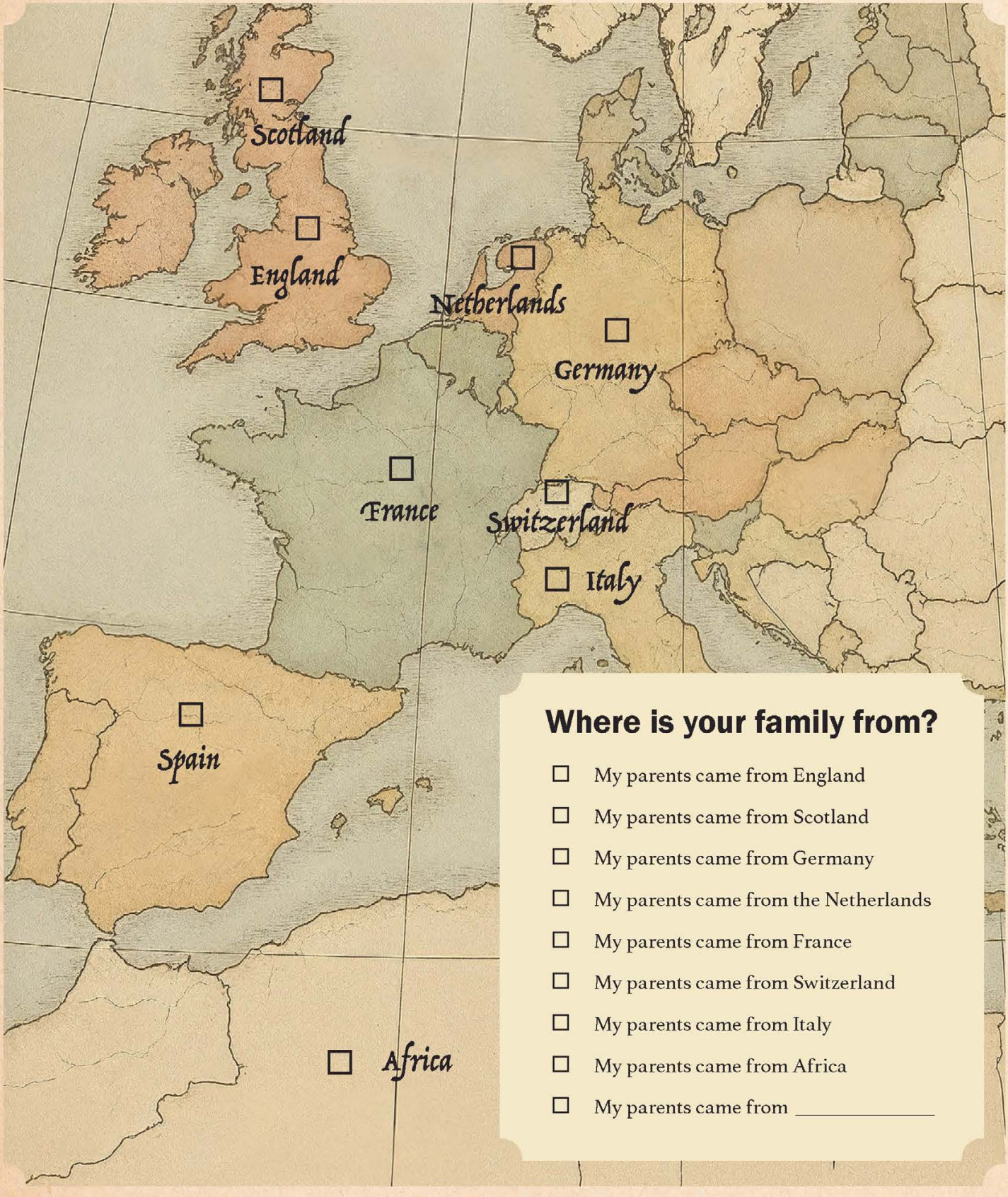
"No taxation without representation!"

"Don't Tread on Me!"

"Join or Die!"

"The Redcoats are coming!"

Tell Us About Your Family



Where is your family from?

- ☐ My parents came from England
- ☐ My parents came from Scotland
- ☐ My parents came from Germany
- ☐ My parents came from the Netherlands
- ☐ My parents came from France
- ☐ My parents came from Switzerland
- ☐ My parents came from Italy
- ☐ My parents came from Africa
- ☐ My parents came from _____

What's your character's background?

Every hero comes from somewhere. What kind of life did you come from before the Revolution called your name?

☐ **The Silver Spoon**

You were born into comfort, with fine clothes, tutors, and a name people recognize.

☐ **The Grit and Grind**

You've worked hard every day, earned every crumb, and know how to survive anything.

☐ **The Humble Heart**

You come from a small home full of love, chores, and stories by candlelight.

☐ **The Merchant's Child**

You grew up counting coins and carrying goods—smart, savvy, and always trading.

☐ **The Orphaned Avenger**

You had to grow up fast—but it made you fierce and unshakable.

☐ **The Rising Star**

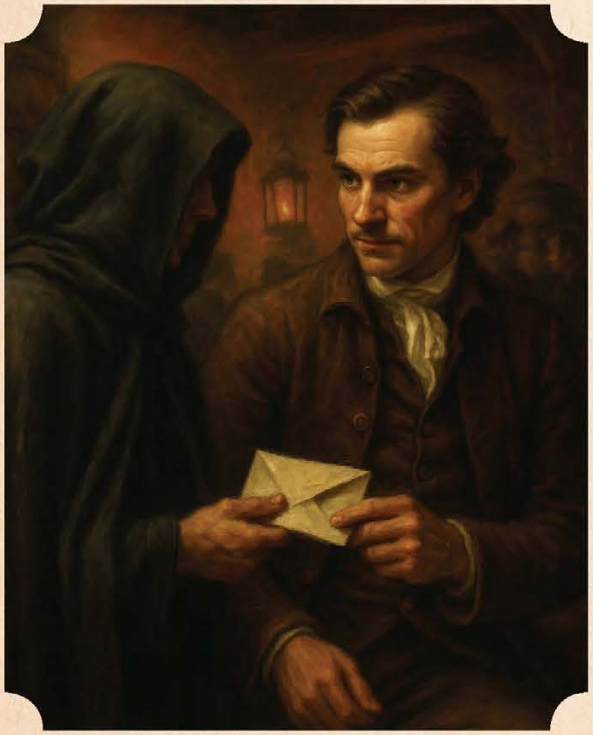
Your family wasn't rich, but your ambition and talent set you apart.

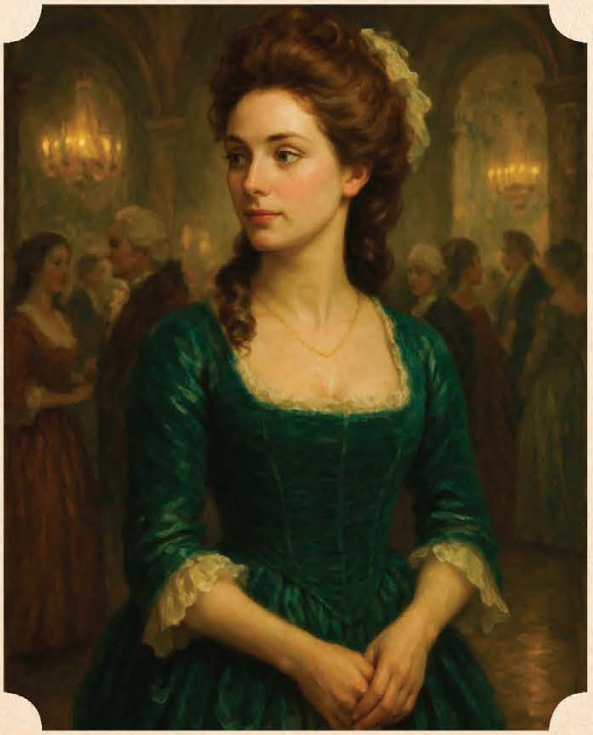
What kind of revolutionary hero are you?

Select as many as three characteristics.

☐ **The Brave One**

You charge into danger to defend your people, no matter the odds.





☐ **The clever One**

You outsmart the enemy with secret codes and daring plans.

More options on the next page!

☐ **The Loyal One**

You stand by your family, your town, and the cause of liberty.

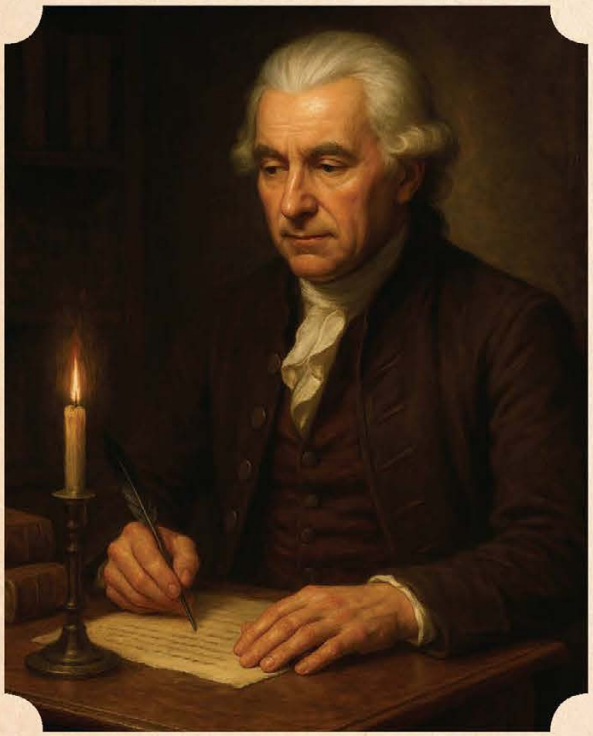
☐ **The Bold One**

You speak your mind, rally the crowd, and inspire others to act.

What kind of revolutionary hero are you?

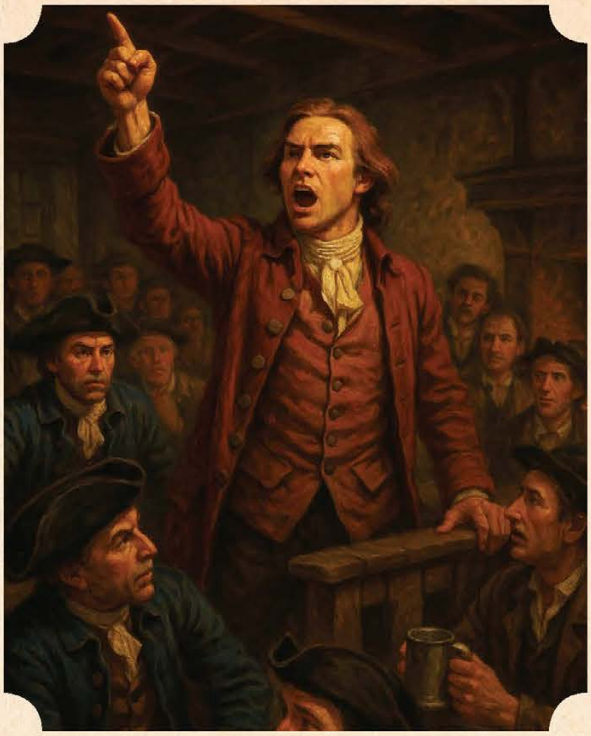
☐ **The Quiet Strength**

You work behind the scenes, steady and dependable.



☐ **The Voice of Reason**

You think deeply, write wisely, and help shape the future.



☐ The Firestarter

You're full of energy, always the first to rise and fight for change.

☐ The Guardian

You protect your community, your friends, and the dream of freedom.

Which famous founding friend did you cross paths with?

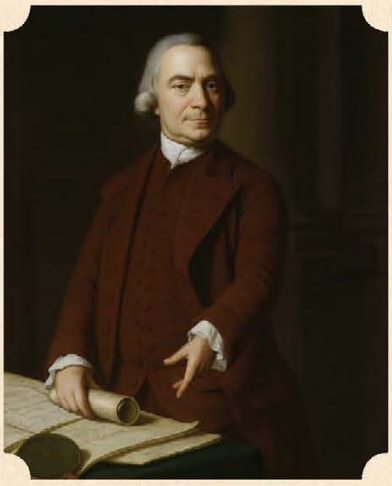
☐ George Washington

☐ Benjamin Franklin

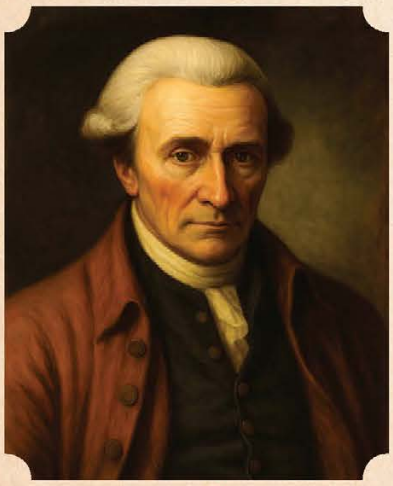
☐ Thomas Jefferson

☐ John Adams

☐ Alexander Hamilton

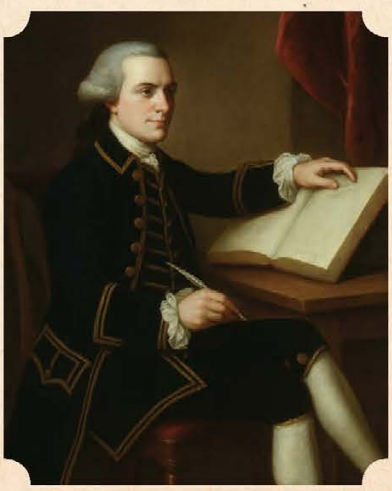


☐ Samuel Adams



☐ Patrick Henry

☐ James Madison



☐ John Hancock

You were THERE!

Which epic event were you a part of?

- ☐ Dumping tea in Boston Harbor
- ☐ First shots at Lexington & Concord
- ☐ The Boston Massacre
- ☐ Battle of Bunker Hill
- ☐ Sneaky win at Princeton
- ☐ Turning point at Saratoga
- ☐ Watching Cornwallis surrender
- ☐ Cheering for the Treaty of Paris

What are you famous for today?

History remembers you for...

- ☐ Signing the Declaration of Independenc
- ☐ Fighting bravely in battle
- ☐ Helping toss the tea into Boston Harbor
- ☐ Surviving the Boston Massacre
- ☐ Helping form the Continental Congress

About PragerU

Prager University ("PragerU") is redefining how people think about media and education. Watched millions of times every day, PragerU is the world's leading educational nonprofit focused on changing minds through the creative use of digital media. From intellectual, fact-based 5-minute videos and powerful personal storytelling to educational animated shows made just for kids–PragerU helps people of all ages discover and keep pro-American values.

PragerU Kids offers edu-tainment, (educational and entertaining content) across the K–12th grade spectrum. With kids shows, cartoons, and literature that teach history, life skills, and character building in an age-appropriate manner, PragerU Kids offers content that parents trust and children love. Watch for free and learn more at PragerUkids.com

About This Book

This book is supplementary material that accompanies "The Road to Liberty" exhibit at the White House to celebrate America 250 which is created in partnership between PragerU, the White House, and the Deptartment of Education.

Find out more at www.PragerU.com/America250

"My celebration of America is a celebration of American values... Liberty, E Pluribus Unum, and In God We Trust."

- Dennis Prager

Celebrate Independence Day with Meaning.

It's time to go beyond burgers and sparklers. The Independence Day Ceremony is a powerful, family-friendly tradition that brings the true story of America's founding to life.

Inspired by the Passover Seder, this interactive ceremony guides families in honoring the bravery, sacrifice, and values that shaped our nation. It's everything you need to turn Independence Day into a celebration of freedom, purpose, and patriotic pride.

Inside you'll find:

- A ready-to-use ceremony script
- Key Revolutionary War events and turning points
- Founding Father profiles
- A fun, educational quiz for all ages

Whether you're a parent, teacher, or proud American, this book helps you pass on the story of our freedom—year after year.

Make Independence Day a tradition your family always honors.

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