
PragerU
THE INDEPENDENCE DAY CEREMONY
The Ritual, the Heroes, and the History
A meaningful Fourth of July ritual for your family
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THE INDEPENDENCE DAY CEREMONY

The Ritual, the Heroes, and the History

A meaningful Fourth of July ritual for your family









PragerU


L. SUPERIOR
NORTH
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC
NEW BRUNSWICK
NOVA S
Saratoga
Albany
Kingston
Westpoint
CONNECTICUT
RHODE I.
Long I.
Brooklyn
Ft. Duquesne
Pittsburg
Baltimore
Annapolis
LAND
DELAWARE
Yorktown
Petersburg
Chesapeake B.
NORTH CAROLINA
Newbern
C. Hatteras
A T L
O C



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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 too many leave out what this holiday is really about: the story of our freedom and the courage of those who secured it.

This ceremony was created to teach the real meaning behind this historic day and to institute a family-friendly tradition to honor Independence Day. We took inspiration from the Passover Seder, in which families retell the story of the Hebrews' journey from slavery to freedom. This Independence Day ceremony invites Americans to do something similar: to remember our struggle and recommit to our Founding values. We do this by using the power of history—of how the United States came into being.



The ceremony is designed to be interactive and meaningful for families and friends to gather in celebration and in remembrance. It honors the bravery and wisdom of the Founding Fathers, the perseverance of early 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

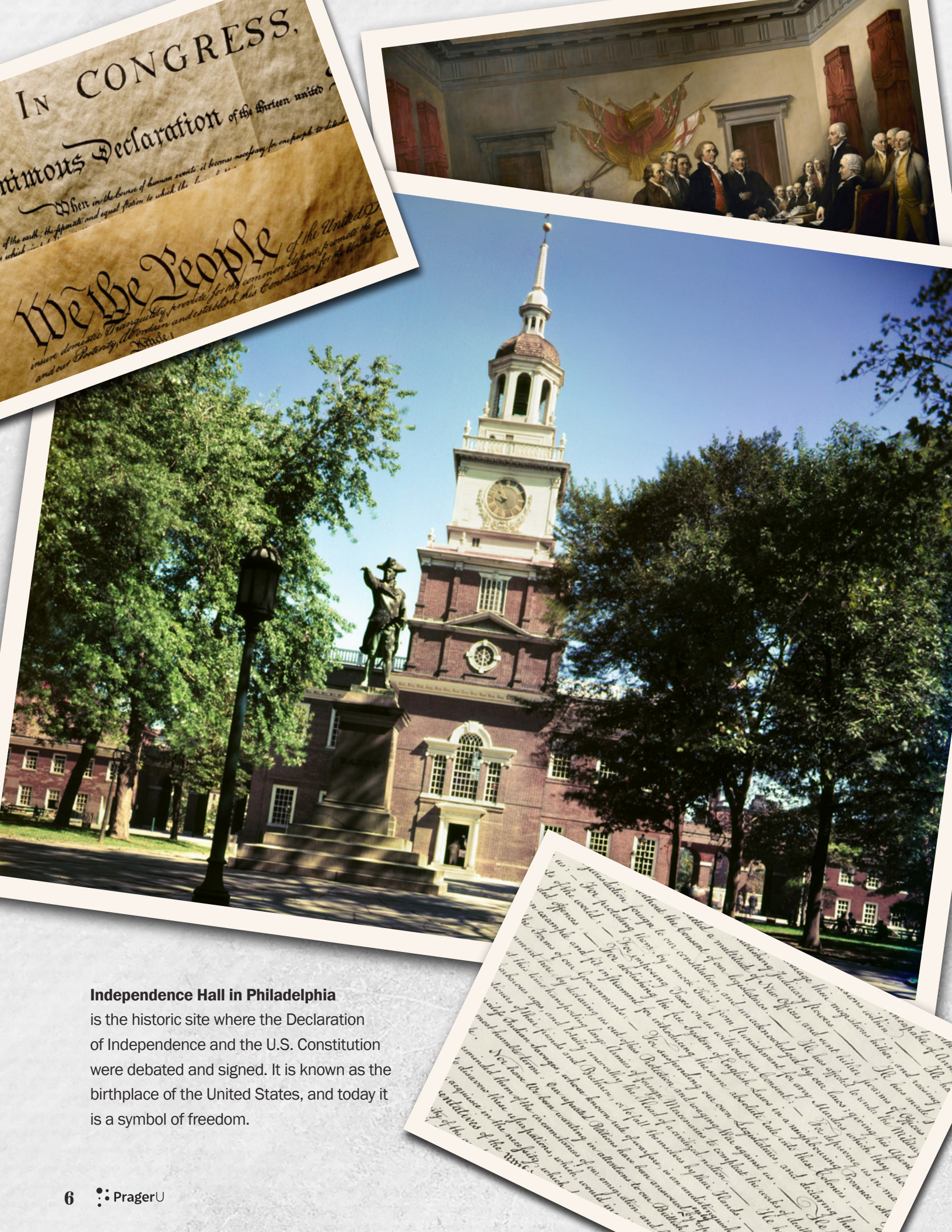
Historical Background on What Led to the Declaration of Independence

A Fun, Family-Friendly Activities to Reinforce Learning in an Engaging Way

Whether you're a history lover, a parent seeking to cultivate deeper appreciation for the holiday, or a proud American eager to honor our roots, the following steps offer a new way to remember America's story. The Independence Day Ceremony transforms the Fourth of July from a day of entertainment into an educational opportunity—a national ritual to express our gratitude for the blessings of America.

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





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

THE INDEPENDENCE DAY CEREMONY



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

Materials & Ingredients Needed:

- Sweet iced tea
- Salty pretzels
- Strawberries, blueberries, and 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 Declaration of Independence
- A pocket Constitution
- The Pledge of Allegiance
- Lyrics to "The Star-Spangled Banner"

SCAN TO PRINT YOUR
OWN RESOURCES

INDEPENDENCE DAY
Ceremony Instructions

1



Put yourself in our Founders' shoes. Try to imagine what it must have felt like for them to pledge their lives to the idea of a new country. Were they scared? Excited?

Ceremony Begins and Host Speaks:

Today, we take a few moments to remember what the Fourth of July is really about and to remind ourselves just how fortunate we are to be Americans. Before America was a nation, it was a dream. Our dreamers fled Europe for freedom. Their distant destination was known in 1620 as "the New World." The land they found was open and spacious. The opportunities were limitless. More than a century after the first Pilgrims landed, people were ready to break away from the Old World of Europe and create a new nation. They did just that on July 4, 1776. They declared themselves free from the tyranny of the King of England, and pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. This Declaration of Independence didn't become real by accident. The American Dream became real because good people were prepared to defend liberty with their lives.

2

Host Invites Children to Read and Answer the Following Questions:

QUESTION #1: *Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July?*

ANSWER: Because July 4th is the birthday of the American people—the day we chose to become a free and independent nation.

QUESTION #2: *Why was America's Founding different?*

ANSWER: Because in America, "We the People" are the king! Our Founders declared our new nation would be a place where the government would serve the people and not the other way around. Abraham Lincoln put it this way: "most governments have been based... on the denial of the equal rights of men... ours began by affirming those rights."

QUESTION #3: *What are the key ideas of America 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*."



3 Host Passes Around an American Coin and Selects Readers:

READER #1: "Liberty" means we are free to pursue our dreams and to go as far in life as hard work and imagination will take us.

READER #2: "In God We Trust" means, in America, we believe our rights and liberties are granted by our Creator, and therefore cannot be taken from us by any human being.

READER #3: "*E Pluribus Unum*" is a Latin phrase that means "From Many, One." Our United States includes people of every religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, and national origin. Out of many people, we become one people—Americans.



LIBERTY





IN GOD WE TRUST

E PLURIBUS UNUM







4 Host Speaks:

We have collected these items to symbolize the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War. That war won our freedom.

5 Host Holds Up Each Symbolic Item and Explains:



We drink sweetened iced tea to remember the Boston Tea Party, when patriots dumped British tea into the ocean to protest unfair taxes levied by King George III.

(all take a sip and say "No taxation without representation!")



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

(all take a bite and read this excerpt from George Washington's February 1778 letter from Valley Forge: "starving as they are, we cannot enough admire the incomparable patience and fidelity of the soldiery.")



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 love of America, symbolized by the colors of the American flag: red, white, and blue.

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

6 Host Speaks:

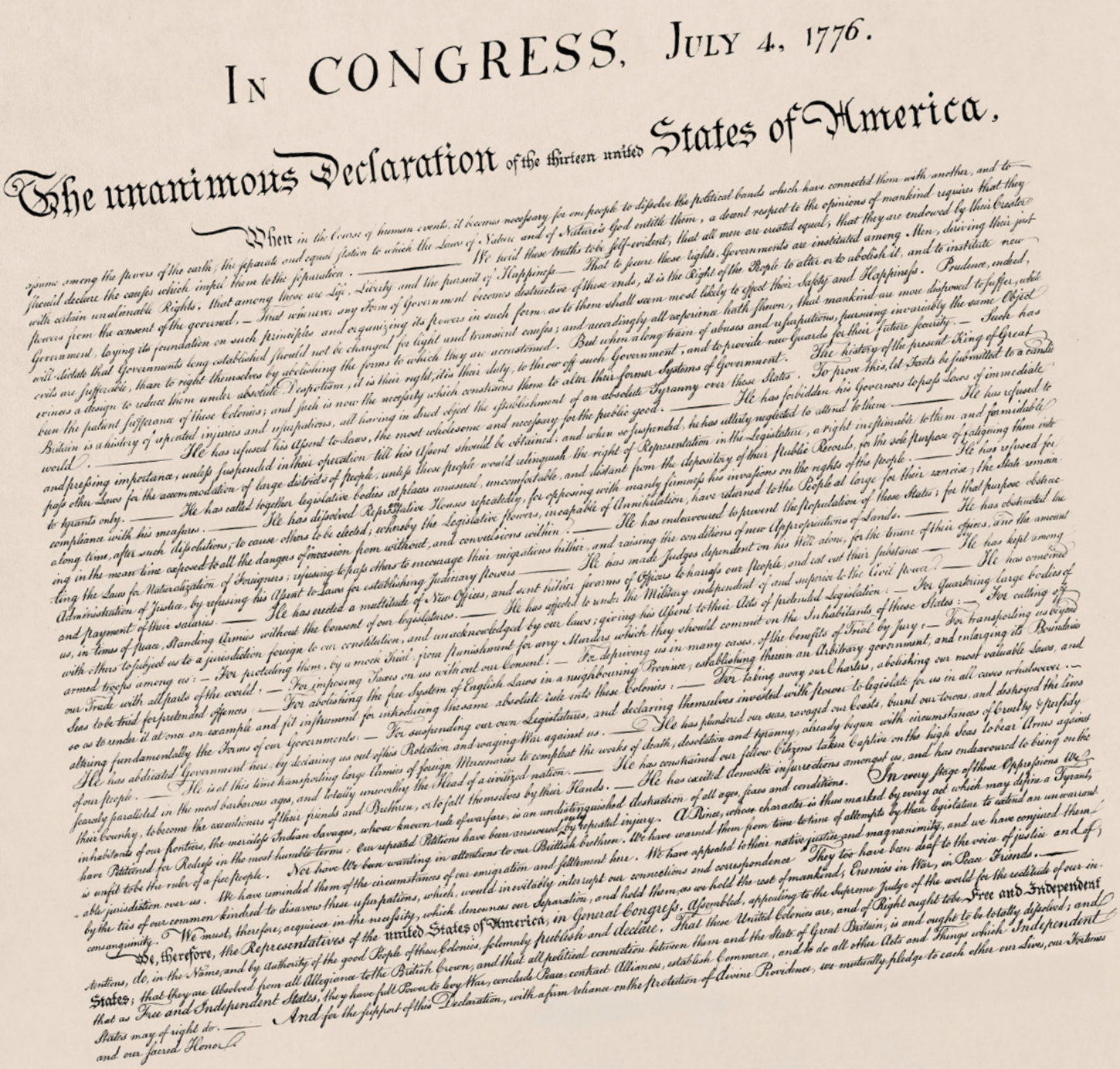
America is known as the "sweet land of liberty!" Today we celebrate the birth of that liberty. But America's story doesn't end there. It begins. On July 4th, our Founders declared a new nation where "all men are created equal" with "unalienable rights to Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." These all-American truths are worth celebrating today, and every day.

America's story is one of which we can all be proud—proud to remember, and proud to continue into the future. So, let us now sign our own names to the Declaration of Independence. This may be a replica of the one our Founders signed, but the words and sentiments are eternal.



7 Everyone Signs the Declaration of Independence.

(sign on the next page)



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. — He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. — He 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. — He 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. — He 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. — He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. — He 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. — He 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. — He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. — He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. — He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance. — He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures. — He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power. — He 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: — For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: — For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: — For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world: — For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: — For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by jury: — For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences. — For 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: — For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: — For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with Power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. — He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us. — He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. — He 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. — He 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. — He 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 British 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.

8 Host Speaks and Everyone Points to the Constitution:

The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776. Our Constitution, another founding document, was signed on September 17, 1787. Let us now point to the Constitution and pledge to defend it from enemies both foreign and domestic. We should remember to celebrate our Constitution every September 17th.

9 Host Distributes Words To "The Star-Spangled Banner" and The Pledge of Allegiance.

10 Host Speaks:

Everyone, join me in the Pledge of Allegiance.
(all recite the Pledge)
Now, let's sing our National Anthem.

11 All Sing.

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 bombs 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?

12 Host Closes the Ceremony.

"Happy Birthday, America."

"Happy Fourth of July."

"U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A!"



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. 16

CREATE YOUR LIBERTY PERSONA

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

p. 18

Test Your Knowledge
INDEPENDENCE DAY QUIZ

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 second 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 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:

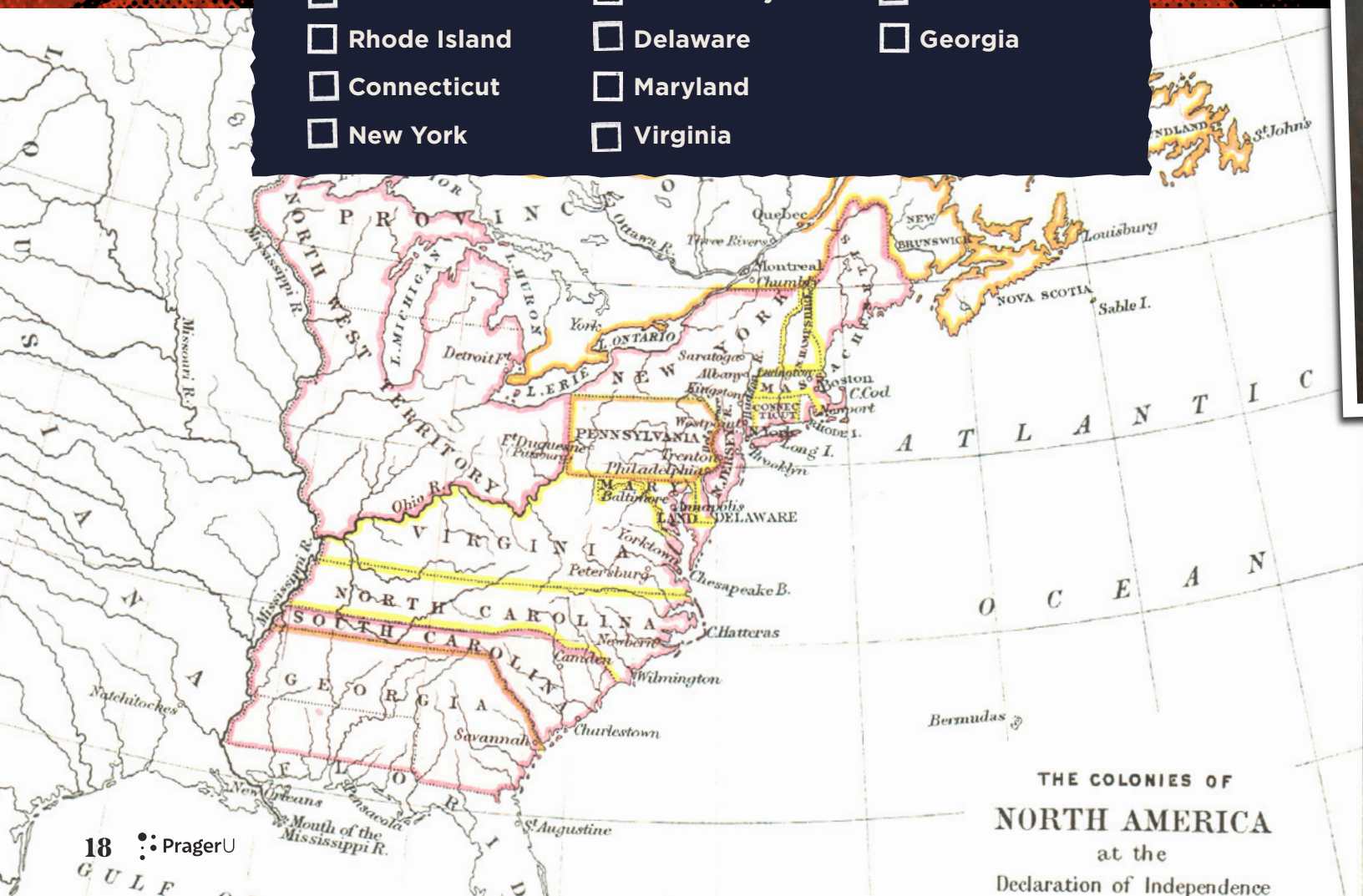
1: B, 2: D, 3: C, 4: A, 5: B
6: D, 7: C, 8: A, 9: C, 10: D

CREATE YOUR *Revolutionary* PERSONA

WHERE DOES YOUR ADVENTURE BEGIN?

1 PICK YOUR COLONY AND FIND IT ON THE MAP:

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



2 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!"


3
TELL US ABOUT YOUR
Family
SCOTLAND
IRELAND
ENGLAND
GERMANY
FRANCE
ITALY
AFRICA
Where is your family from?
My parents came from England
My parents came from Scotland
My parents came from Ireland
My parents came from France
My parents came from Germany
My parents came from Italy
My parents came from Africa
My parents came from

5 WHAT'S YOUR CHARACTER'S BACKGROUND?



☐ 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?

6





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.





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 and are 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.



YOU WERE THERE!

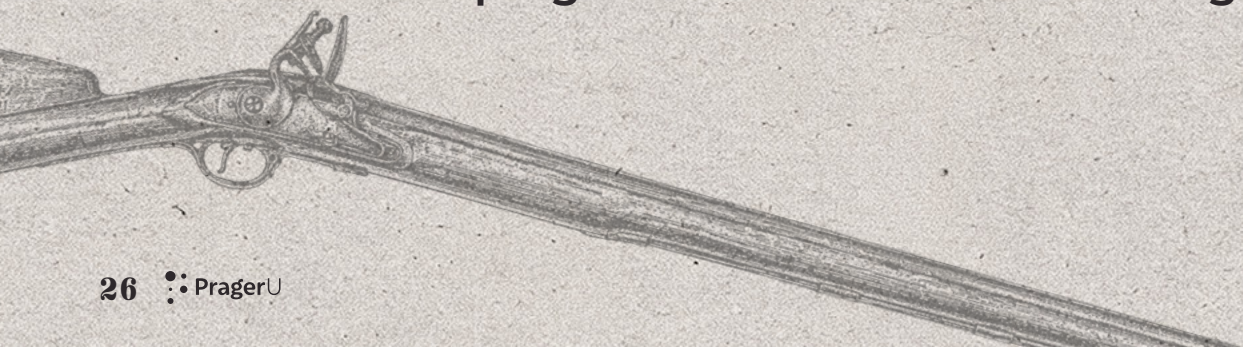
Which epic event were you a part of?

- ☐ Dumping tea into the Boston Harbor
- ☐ First shots at Lexington and Concord
- ☐ The Boston Massacre
- ☐ Battle of Bunker Hill
- ☐ The sneaky win at Princeton
- ☐ Crossing the Delaware with Washington
- ☐ Turning point at Saratoga
- ☐ Watching Cornwallis surrender
- ☐ Cheering for the Treaty of Paris

WHAT ARE YOU FAMOUS FOR?

History remembers you for...

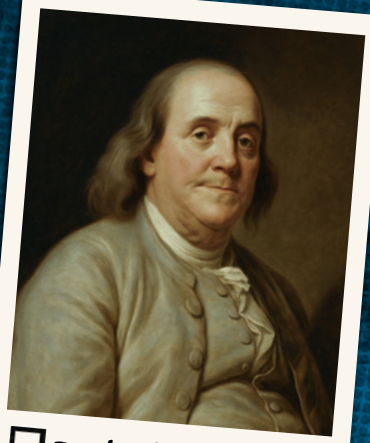
- ☐ Signing the Declaration of Independence
- ☐ Fighting bravely in battle
- ☐ Joining Paul Revere on his famous ride
- ☐ Surviving the winter at Valley Forge
- ☐ Helping form the Continental Congress



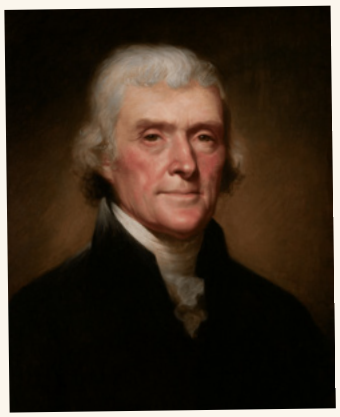
WHICH FAMOUS FOUNDING FATHER DID YOU MEET ALONG THE WAY?



☐ George Washington



☐ Benjamin Franklin



☐ Thomas Jefferson



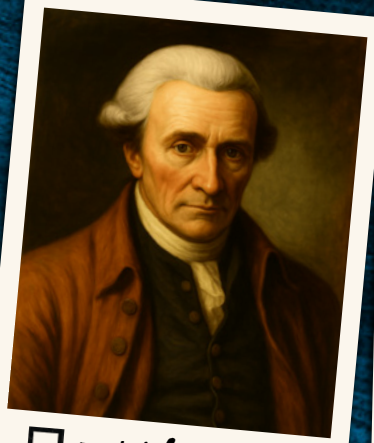
☐ John Adams



☐ Alexander Hamilton



☐ Samuel Adams



☐ Patrick Henry



☐ James Madison



☐ John Hancock


FREEDOM TRUCK
Patriots Welcome

Explore The Freedom Truck

MOBILE MUSEUM

Step inside the Freedom Truck — an immersive experience that brings the fight for American independence to life.

The Roots of America ..... p. 30-31
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THE Roots OF AMERICA

The foundational principles of America are rooted in the Western and Judeo-Christian traditions that the colonists inherited through their British roots. This heritage of ideas shaped the American mind long before their colonial debate with England.

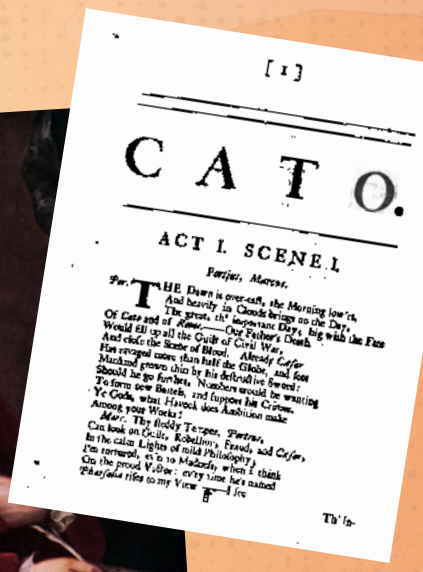
Athens & Rome

The Greco-Roman classics gave the American colonists a framework for understanding nature, reason, politics, and virtue. This shaped their view of the different forms of government and the importance of a democratic republic, the need to protect liberty from corruption and tyranny, and that natural laws should determine the principles of government.

Joseph Addison's 1712 play, *Cato, a Tragedy*, was one of George Washington's favorite plays, and he and his men performed it during the long winter at Valley Forge. Cato's stoic, unwavering defense of liberty appealed to General Washington:

"Content thyself to be obscurely good. When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway, the post of honor is a private station."





[1]

CATO.

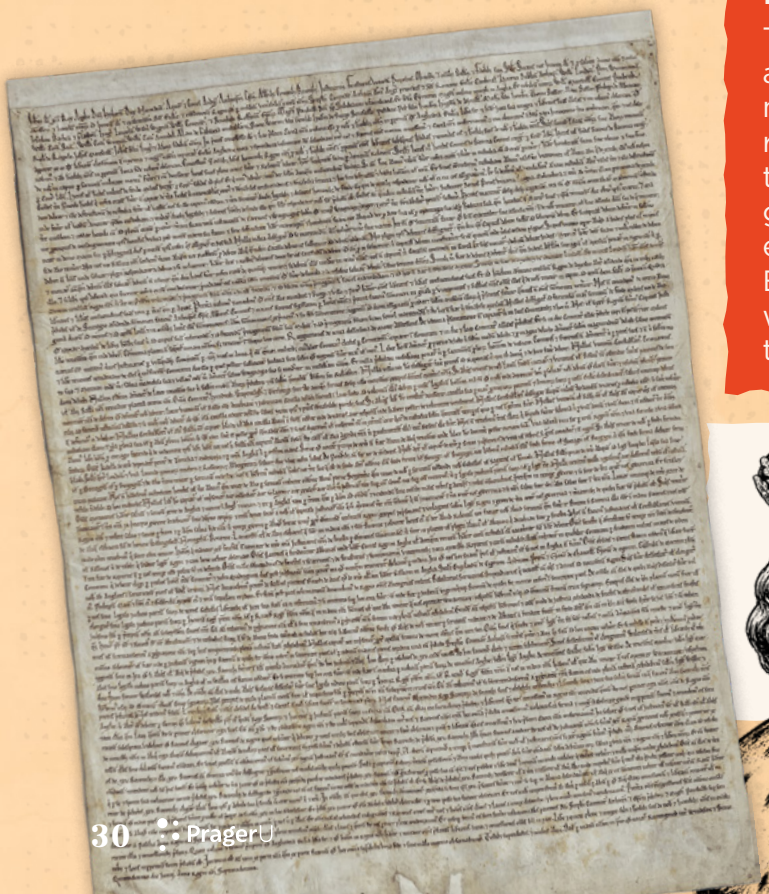
ACT I. SCENE I.

Portius, Marcus.

Por. THE Dawn is over-cast, the Morning low'rs,
And heavily in Clouds brings on the Day,
The great, th' important Day, big with the Fate
Of Cato and of Rome.——Our Father's Death
Would fill up all the Guilt of Civil War,
And close the Scene of Blood. Already Cæsar
Has ravaged more than half the Globe, and sees
Mankind grown thin by his destructive Sword:
Should he go further, Numbers would be wanting
To form new Battels, and suppose his Crimes.
Ye Gods, what Havock does Ambition make
Among your Works!

Marc. Thy fleddy Temper, Portius,
Can look on Guilt, Rebellion, Fraud, and Cæsar,
In the calm Lights of mild Philosophy;
I'm tortured, ev'n to Madness, when I think
On the proud Victor: ev'ry time he's named
Pharsalia rises to my View ——I see

Th'In-



London

The English tradition provided the colonies with a framework for the rule of law. For example, many colonial liberties were based on the rights recognized by the Magna Carta. Written in 1215, the Magna Carta was the first document to guarantee certain rights to subjects and to make explicit that the king was not above the law. English thinkers John Locke and Algernon Sidney wrote that each person had inherent rights and that governments should be based on consent.



We have...granted to all freemen of our kingdom, for us and our heirs for ever, all the underwritten liberties, to be had and held by them and their heirs, of us and our heirs for ever.

King John
Magna Carta, 1215

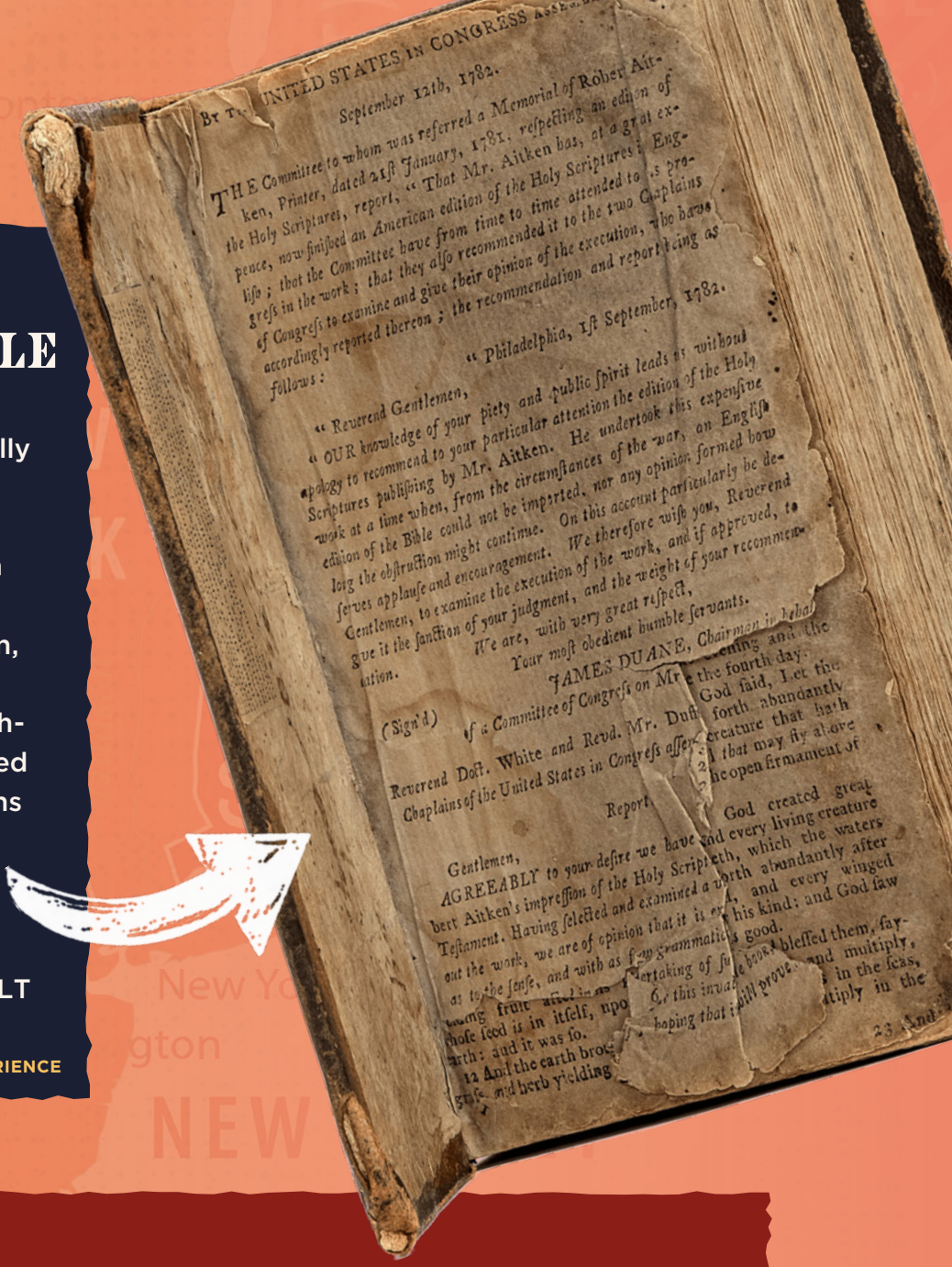
OBJECTS OF HISTORY

THE AITKEN BIBLE

As tensions escalated with Britain, the colonists eventually could no longer purchase Bibles from England. In 1782, Congress passed a resolution to print the Bible. Printed in Philadelphia by Robert Aitken, this "Bible of the Revolution" was the first complete English-language Bible to be published in the United States. It remains the only edition of the Bible authorized by Congress.

SCAN TO UNLOCK THE PRAGERU VAULT AND LEARN MORE

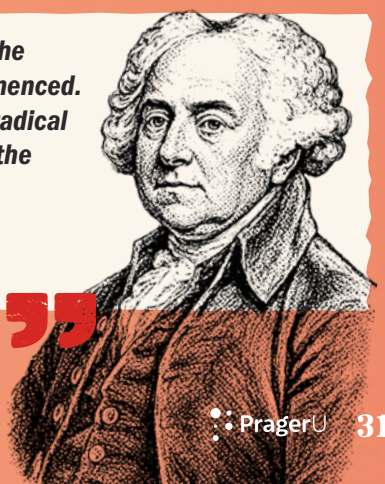
COURTESY OF AMERICAN JOURNEY EXPERIENCE



Jerusalem

Religious faith—especially Christianity—shaped European and colonial thought and tradition, teaching that "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God" serve as the best foundation for government. The truth that each person is made in the image and likeness of God is the basis of human equality and underscores the principle that governments should protect individuals' rights and equal dignity.

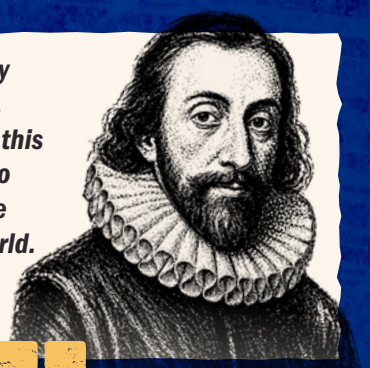
> ***But what do We mean by the American Revolution? Do We mean the American War? The Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the Minds and Hearts of the People... This radical Change in the Principles, Opinions, Sentiments, and Affection of the People, was the real American Revolution.***
>
> **John Adams to Hezekiah Niles**
> **February 13, 1818**



Background:
Map of the Thirteen Original Colonies | Richard Zietz

THE First SETTLEMENTS

> *For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world.*
>
> **John Winthrop**
> **A Model for Christian Charity, 1630**



Cape Henry & Jamestown

In 1606, King James granted a charter to the Virginia Company of London to establish a colony in the New World. Soon after, settlers sailed for Virginia, enduring 144 days at sea. Upon landing at Cape Henry, they erected a large wooden cross and claimed the land for their Christian faith, showing how deeply faith inspired and shaped Britain's earliest colonization efforts in North America.

After exploring the Chesapeake Bay, the colonists chose a spot upstream on the James River for their permanent settlement, which they named "James Forte" after the King—we know it today as Jamestown. The colonists' faith sustained them through many hardships—from mosquitoes, disease, and failed crops—in the New World.

Background:
The Landing at Cape Henry, April 1607,
Stephen Reid (1928)



Painting:
The Embarkation of the Pilgrims
Robert Walter Weir (1857)

Pilgrims at Plymouth

In 1620, a royal charter granted to the Council of New England backed a group of Protestant separatists fleeing religious persecution in England. Sailing aboard the Mayflower, these Pilgrims braved rough seas that drove them off course. Instead of their intended destination, they landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, forging a community rooted in faith and self-determination that would shape America's earliest story of liberty and hope.

Before disembarking, the Pilgrims drafted a covenant to create a society for "the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of [their] King and Country." This Mayflower Compact became a vital foundation for self-government that would shape America's future political traditions.

The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay

Other Protestant dissenters followed the Pilgrims, settling across New England. In 1628, Puritans founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where leader John Winthrop envisioned a "City upon a hill," a model for the world through faithfulness to God. Though their community was largely closed to differing theological beliefs, these early Puritan settlers profoundly influenced British colonization and inspired a wave of mass migration to the New World, shaping America's earliest identity and moral vision.

TENSIONS Escalate

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO LIVE UNDER BRITISH RULE?

1763



THE FRENCH & INDIAN WAR

1754–1763

The French and Indian War (1754–1763) left Britain with vast newly acquired territory and crushing debt. To raise revenue, Parliament taxed the colonies without their consent, sparking outrage.

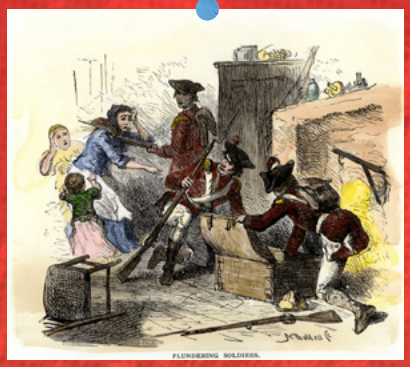
1765



THE STAMP ACT

1765

The Stamp Act taxed all paper products. The Stamp Act Congress (1765) was the first colonial congress that opposed British laws. The Act was repealed the following year after widespread protest.



THE QUARTERING ACT

1765

The Quartering Act forced colonists to house and supply British troops.

1774



THE FIRST CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

1754–1763

Defying Parliament, Massachusetts urged the colonies to unite. Virginia and others joined, prompting royal governors to dissolve legislatures. Colonies sent delegates to the First Continental Congress (September 1774), which adopted the Continental Association to boycott British trade, petitioned the King, and vowed to meet again if ignored.

1773

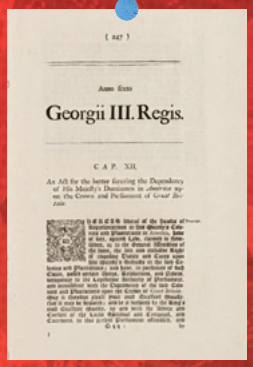


THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

DECEMBER 16, 1773

After repealing most Townshend taxes, Parliament passed a new Tea Act (1773). In protest, on December 16, the Sons of Liberty dumped 342 chests of tea into the Boston Harbor. Britain retaliated with the Coercive Acts, which closed Boston's port, revoked Massachusetts's charter, and imposed a new Quartering Act.

1766



Anno Sexto

Georgii III. Regis.

CAP. XII.

THE DECLARATORY ACT

1766

On the same day Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, it passed the Declaratory Act, which asserted its authority to legislate for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever."

1767



THE TOWNSHEND ACT

1767

The Townshend Acts taxed goods like tea and paper, created juryless Admiralty Courts, and suspended New York's legislature.

1770



THE BOSTON MASSACRE

MARCH 5, 1770

On March 5, 1770, anger erupted in Boston. Although the Quartering Act had been repealed, British troops still patrolled the city, and 11-year-old Christopher Seider was killed by a British customs officer. That night, colonists clashed with eight Redcoats and shots were fired, killing five colonists. Among those killed was Crispus Attucks, the first African American to die for the cause of independence.

'Tis Time TO PART



> ***"Everything that is right or reasonable pleads for separation. The blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature cries, 'TIS TIME TO PART."***
>
> **Thomas Paine**
> ***Common Sense***

COMMON SENSE
ADDRESSED TO THE
INHABITANTS
OF
AMERICA,
On the following interesting
SUBJECTS.

I. Of the Origin and Design of Government in general, with concise Remarks on the English Constitution.
II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.
III. Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs.
IV. Of the present Ability of America, with some miscellaneous Reflections.

Written by an ENGLISHMAN.
By Thomas Paine

Man knows no Master save creating HEAVEN,
Or those whom choice and common good ordain.
THOMSON.

PHILADELPHIA, Printed
And Sold by R. BELL, in Third-Street, 1776.

Common Sense

Published anonymously in January 1776, Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* was the first clarion call for independence, and remains one of the bestselling titles in all of American history.

In a population of two and a half million people, *Common Sense* sold 100,000 copies in three months and an estimated half-million copies over the course of the American Revolution.

Title page of Thomas Paine's revolutionary pamphlet Common Sense, published in Philadelphia in 1776.



Join, or Die

The divided snake symbolized the different colonies and their need to work together for their common defense. First used during the French and Indian War, it later became a rallying cry for colonial unity against British tyranny.



Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death

In 1775, as British tyranny grew and tensions escalated, the Second Virginia Convention met at St. John's Church in Richmond to decide the colonies' fate. There, Patrick Henry's fiery "Give me liberty, or give me death!" speech inspired his fellow delegates—including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson—to take the first bold step toward American independence.

Team GEORGE III

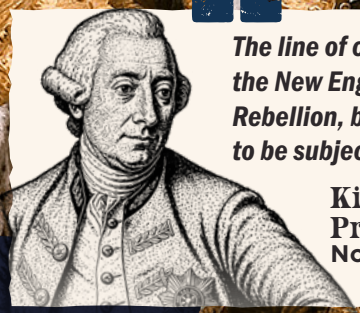
THE KING'S MEN!

ARE YOU A *Loyalist*

King George III (1738–1820) was the monarch of Great Britain and Ireland during one of the most turbulent periods in British and American history. Ascending to the throne in 1760 at the age of twenty-two, he sought to strengthen royal authority and maintain the unity of the British Empire. To George III, the American colonies were subjects of the Crown, enjoying the protection of the empire but expected to contribute to its maintenance—especially after Britain's costly victory in the French and Indian War (1754–1763).

In the wake of that war, Parliament imposed taxes on the colonists without their consent and stationed troops in the colonies, which George and his agents used aggressively to collect taxes and enforce regulations. The King favored firm action to suppress unrest, issuing a Royal Proclamation against colonial rebellion and sedition and rejecting the Olive Branch Petition, by which the Continental Congress sought reconciliation.

George III saw the American resistance as a rebellion against his rule and the rejection of British supreme power. His increasingly harsh measures strengthened colonial unity and defined his actions as those of a tyrant, as it says in the Declaration of Independence, "unfit to be the ruler of a free people." By 1776, the divide between England and the American colonies was irreparable.



> ***The line of conduct now seems chalked out... the New England governments are in a State of Rebellion, blows must decide whether they are to be subject to this Country or independent.***
>
> **King George III to Prime Minister Lord North**
> **November 18, 1774**

OBJECTS OF HISTORY

ROYAL PROCLAMATION OF REBELLION AND SEDITION

In August 1775, the King issued a royal proclamation for suppressing rebellion and sedition in the colonies and ordered all British officers to "bring the traitors to justice." In December, Parliament passed the Prohibitory Act and barred all trade between England and the colonies and authorized the seizure of American ships and cargo.

"By the King, a Proclamation, For Suppressing Rebellion and Sedition" August 23, 1775



BY THE
K I N G,
A
PROCLAMATION,
For Suppreſſing Rebellion and Sedition.

GEORGE R.

WHEREAS many of Our Subjects in divers Parts of Our Colonies and Plantations in North America, miſled by dangerous and ill-deſigning Men, and forgetting the Allegiance which they owe to the Power that has protected and ſuſtained them, after various diſorderly Acts committed in Diſturbance of the Public Peace, to the Obſtruction of lawful Commerce, and to the Oppreſſion of Our loyal Subjects carrying on the ſame, have at length proceeded to an open and avowed Rebellion, by arraying themſelves in hoſtile Manner to withſtand the Execution of the Law, and traiterouſly preparing, ordering, and levying War againſt Us.

AND whereas there is Reaſon to apprehend that ſuch Rebellion hath been promoted and encouraged by the traiterous Correſpondences, Counſels, and Practices of divers wicked and deſperate Perſons, within this Realm, and that none of Our Subjects may neglect or withdraw from the Duty of their Allegiance, or be ſeduced by any Pretence of Excuſe or Miſrepreſentation thereof, or through any Doubt of the Puniſhment that may be juſtly inflicted on ſuch Traitors and Rebels, their Adherents, Abettors, and Comforters, for their Treaſon and Rebellion, We have thought fit to iſſue Our Royal Proclamation, hereby declaring Our Reſolution to proſecute, with the utmoſt Vigour, all Perſons who ſhall preſume to continue in Arms againſt Us, or in any Manner to adhere unto, aid, aſſiſt, or abet Our Enemies in their traiterous Deſigns and Actions, or to correſpond with, conceal, or give Countenance to them, knowing them to be ſuch, as well as to bring the Traitors to Juſtice.

Team GEORGE OR A Patriot

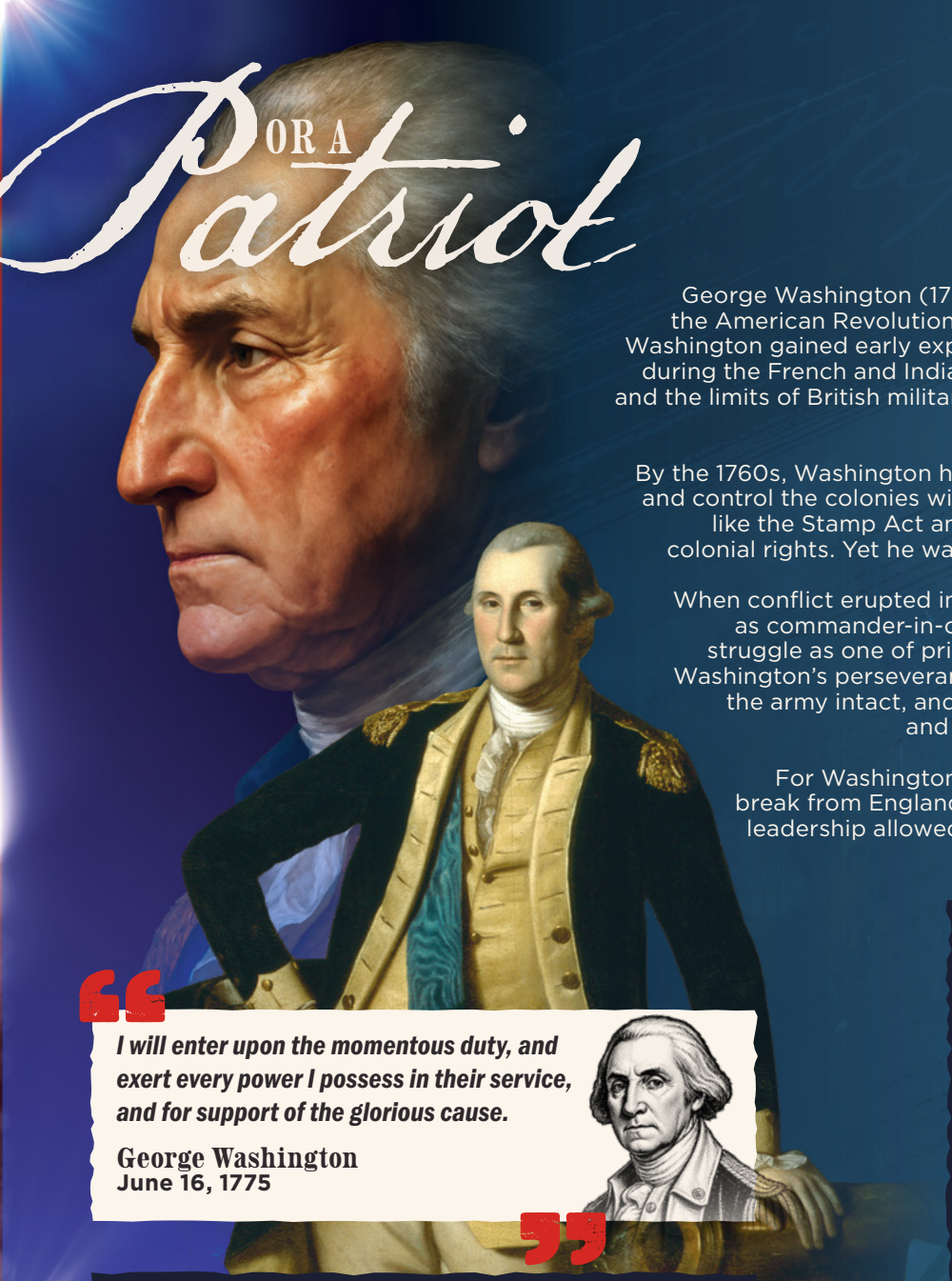
THE PATRIOTS!

George Washington (1732–1799) emerged as the foremost leader of the American Revolution and the first president of the United States. Washington gained early experience as a surveyor and later as an officer during the French and Indian War, where he learned both the strengths and the limits of British military power. Washington sought a British Army commission, but was denied.

By the 1760s, Washington had grown critical of Britain's attempts to tax and control the colonies without representation. He opposed measures like the Stamp Act and the Coercive Acts, believing they violated colonial rights. Yet he was cautious, initially hoping for reconciliation.

When conflict erupted in 1775, Washington was unanimously chosen as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. He viewed the struggle as one of principle—self-government or the rule of force. Washington's perseverance through early defeats, his ability to keep the army intact, and his eventual victories at Trenton, Princeton, and Yorktown secured American independence.

For Washington, the American Revolution was not merely a break from England, but the establishment of a new nation. His leadership allowed the colonists to successfully wage war and emerge as a constitutional government.



> *I will enter upon the momentous duty, and exert every power I possess in their service, and for support of the glorious cause.*
>
> George Washington
> June 16, 1775

OBJECTS OF HISTORY

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S SPECTACLES

These brass-rimmed spectacles were worn by George Washington toward the end of his service as General of the Continental Army. They were eventually gifted to Alexander Hamilton.

SCAN TO UNLOCK THE PRAGERU VAULT AND LEARN MORE

Courtesy of ***American Journey Experience***

OBJECTS OF HISTORY

THE OLIVE BRANCH PETITION

The Olive Branch Petition of July 1775 was the Continental Congress' final attempt at reconciliation. The Americans affirmed their loyalty to the King and called for an end to Parliament's unjust laws, but George III declared them to be in rebellion and refused to receive their petition.

Olive Branch Petition, July 5, 1775





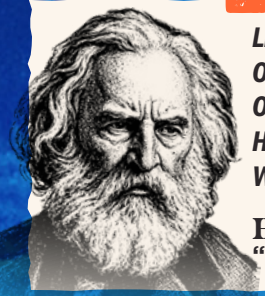
THE *Shot* HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD

PAUL REVERE

To stop the rebellion, British General Thomas Gage was ordered to capture colonial leaders and seize hidden weapons. On April 18, 1775, Boston silversmith Paul Revere, the courier of Massachusetts's colonial legislature, learned that a large body of Redcoats was marching to Concord. He and other riders raced to warn colonists.

Revere sped past villages and farms, alerting militias and warning Samuel Adams and John Hancock, members of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, who were in nearby Lexington. There, his urgent midnight ride roused communities before British forces arrived.

By sunrise, militiamen stood ready in Lexington. Revere's swift warning helped spark the first armed clash of the American Revolution and turn resistance into open war for independence.



Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-Five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
"Paul Revere's Ride" (1860)

"One if by land, two if by sea."

Old North Church, Boston's oldest, served as a secret signal tower for the Sons of Liberty. On April 18, 1775, two lanterns shone from its steeple, warning Paul Revere that British troops were crossing the Charles River, sending him on his famed midnight ride.

THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON

On the morning of April 19, 1775, the Redcoats met a small group of colonial militia that had assembled on the Lexington town green. Though greatly outnumbered, these "Minutemen" were determined to protect their homes and slow the British advance.

Upon entering Lexington and seeing the armed colonials, the British forces quickened their march to a slow run and, as they had been trained, the advance units deployed to a line of battle across the field. The British major in charge ordered the rebels to disperse. Moments later, shots were fired, followed by a series of volleys. Eight militiamen were killed.



Minutemen were ordinary colonists who were ready to fight for their freedom at a minute's notice. They were farmers, blacksmiths, shopkeepers, and other everyday people who trained as part of local militias. Even though they had regular jobs and families, they stayed prepared to defend their towns if danger came.

Their role became famous on April 19, 1775, at the Battles of Lexington and Concord. When British soldiers marched to take colonial weapons, the Minutemen quickly gathered and stood their ground. Because they were ready so fast, they helped turn a small conflict into the start of the Revolutionary War. The Minutemen were important because they showed that the fight for independence was not just led by famous leaders—it was carried out by regular people. Their bravery and quick action proved that everyday citizens could stand up and fight for freedom.

Background:
The Battle of Lexington
Alonzo Chappel (1856)

THE Shot HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD

THE BATTLE OF CONCORD

CLASH AT CONCORD BRIDGE

Later that morning, after the British troops failed to find the hidden military supplies in the town of Concord, Massachusetts, colonial militiamen halted them on Concord Bridge. As the Redcoats retreated, militia from across the region—alerted the night before—harassed them all the way back to Boston, firing from behind trees, walls, and barns.

Though the British were forced into retreat, the colonists understood the fight was far from over. Recognizing the need for greater preparation, colonial forces gathered in Cambridge after the battles of Lexington and Concord and planned to fortify the commanding heights surrounding Boston to deter further British attacks.



By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
"Concord Hymn," July 4, 1837

Background:
The Shot Heard 'Round the World
By Domenick D'Andrea (2009)

OBJECTS OF HISTORY

PETER SALEM LETTER

SCAN TO UNLOCK THE PRAGERU VAULT AND LEARN MORE

Courtesy of ***American Journey Experience***

This document bears the mark of Peter Salem, a formerly enslaved African American patriot who fought with extraordinary courage during the American Revolution. Unable to read or write, he signed with his mark—a common practice among those denied formal education. After gaining his freedom, Salem enlisted in the Massachusetts militia and fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, where he is credited with mortally wounding British Major John Pitcairn. This simple mark, made by a man once denied basic rights, symbolizes the enduring fight for liberty and equality that shaped the foundation of the United States.

THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL

After learning of Britain's plan to seize the hills around Boston and control its harbor, militia moved under cover of night to occupy Bunker Hill and hastily built breastworks on nearby Breed's Hill, overlooking the city from the north.

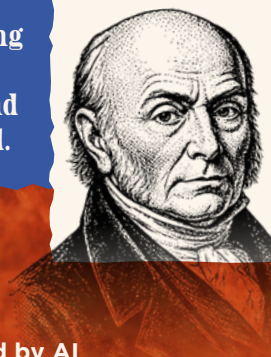
Contemptuous of the "rabble in arms," British Regulars planned a direct assault. Twice they advanced and twice the Americans, holding fire until close range, shattered British ranks and forced retreat. But the colonists, short of powder and reinforcements, could not withstand the third assault. British soldiers swarmed the redoubt, driving defenders out and stabbing them with bayonets.

Among those killed was General Joseph Warren, Boston physician and president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, who became an early patriot martyr. Though the British won the ground, their staggering losses forced them to reconsider their strategy, revealing that defeating the determined Americans would be far harder and bloodier than they had anticipated.



...Almighty God cover the heads of our Country men, and be a shield to our Dear Friends...

Abigail Adams to John Adams
June 18, 1775



I saw with my own eyes those fires, and heard Britannia's thunders in the Battle of Bunker's hill and witnessed the tears of my mother and mingled with them my own, at the fall of Warren a dear friend of my father, and a beloved Physician to me.

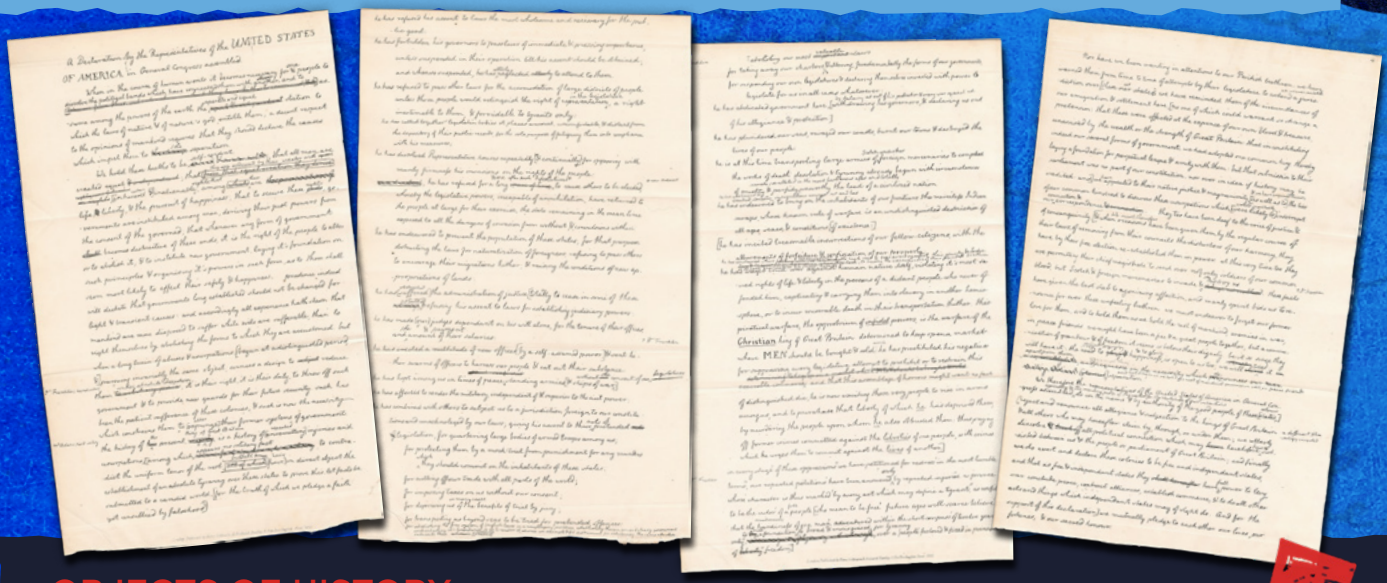
John Quincy Adams
March 1846

Background:
The Battle of Bunker Hill
Edward Percy Moran (1856)
The original painting has been extended by AI

THE Making OF THE Declaration

In June 1776, as the momentum for independence grew, the Second Continental Congress appointed a Committee of Five to draft a formal statement declaring America's independence. The committee consisted of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. The committee elected Thomas Jefferson to write the first draft. Jefferson asked Adams to take the lead, but Adams declined, giving several reasons: Jefferson was a Virginian, while Adams was from Massachusetts; Jefferson, a Southerner, would be better received; Adams feared his own draft would face harsher scrutiny due to his outspoken support; and finally, he believed Jefferson had the superior pen.

Over 17 days, Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, with important input from Adams and Benjamin Franklin. They drew ideas from George Mason's draft of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. Congress cut a quarter of the text and made several important changes, including adding references to the "Supreme Judge of the World" and "divine Providence."



OBJECTS OF HISTORY

DRAFT PAGES OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

SCAN TO UNLOCK THE PRAGERU VAULT AND LEARN MORE

COURTESY OF AMERICAN JOURNEY EXPERIENCE

These rare pages capture the moment when revolution turned into resolve. Handwritten by Thomas Jefferson and reviewed by the Committee of Five, this working draft reveals the edits, revisions, and powerful ideas that shaped America's founding document before it was presented to Congress and declared to the world.

THE COMMITTEE OF FIVE

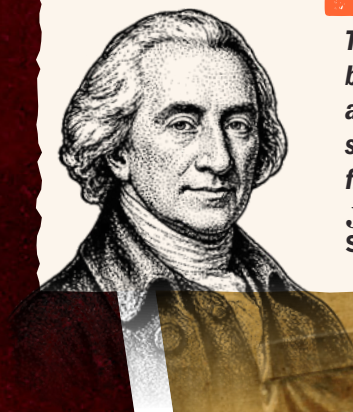
Though Jefferson was the primary penman of the Declaration, the other members reviewed and edited the draft before presenting it to Congress for debate and further revisions.



1 Thomas Jefferson
2 Robert R. Livingston
3 Benjamin Franklin
4 Roger Sherman
5 John Adams

Painting:
The Declaration Committee
Currier and Ives (1876)

THE Debate & Vote FOR INDEPENDENCE



> *To escape from the protection we have in British rule by declaring independence would be like destroying a House before we have got another, in winter, with a small family; then asking a neighbour to take us in and finding he is unprepared.*
>
> **John Dickinson**
> **Speech to the Continental Congress (July 1, 1776)**

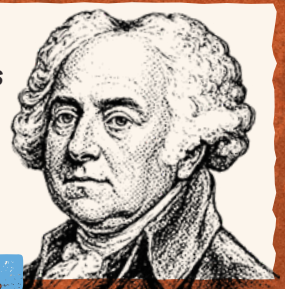
On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee proposed that the Continental Congress declare independence, form foreign alliances, and draft a confederation. Still divided, Congress delayed the vote until July while delegates sought instructions.

Debate began July 1. John Dickinson urged delay, but John Adams argued forcefully for immediate independence, earning praise from Thomas Jefferson. In the first vote, nine colonies supported independence, Pennsylvania and South Carolina opposed, Delaware split, and New York abstained. Edward Rutledge sought a one-day delay so delegates could reconsider their previous vote.

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress voted in favor of American independence. Edward Rutledge secured South Carolina's support. John Dickinson and other Pennsylvania moderates abstained, flipping that colony's vote in favor of independence. The deciding vote came down to Caesar Rodney, who, despite a severe illness, made a daring 80-mile ride through the rainy night to break Delaware's tie and vote for independence. New York joined a week later, making support unanimous. Having passed Richard Henry Lee's resolution, Congress now needed a formal declaration.



> *I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory.*
>
> **John Adams to Abigail Adams**
> **July 3, 1776**



> *When forced, therefore, to resort to arms for redress, an appeal to the tribunal of the world was deemed proper for our justification. This was the object of the Declaration of Independence.*
>
> **Thomas Jefferson to Henry Lee**
> **May 8, 1825**

Painting:
The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, July 4, 1776
Charles Edouard Armand-Dumaresq (1873)

THE First Phase OF THE War

American Retreat from New York



Washington Crossing the Delaware, Emanuel Leutze (1851)
With Goupil, Vibert and Company, Paris and New York, 1851–52; Marshall O. Roberts, New York, 1852–died 1880; his estate, 1880–1897; sale, Ortgies and Company, Fifth Avenue Art Galleries, New York, January 20, 1897, no. 172; John S. Kennedy, New York, 1897

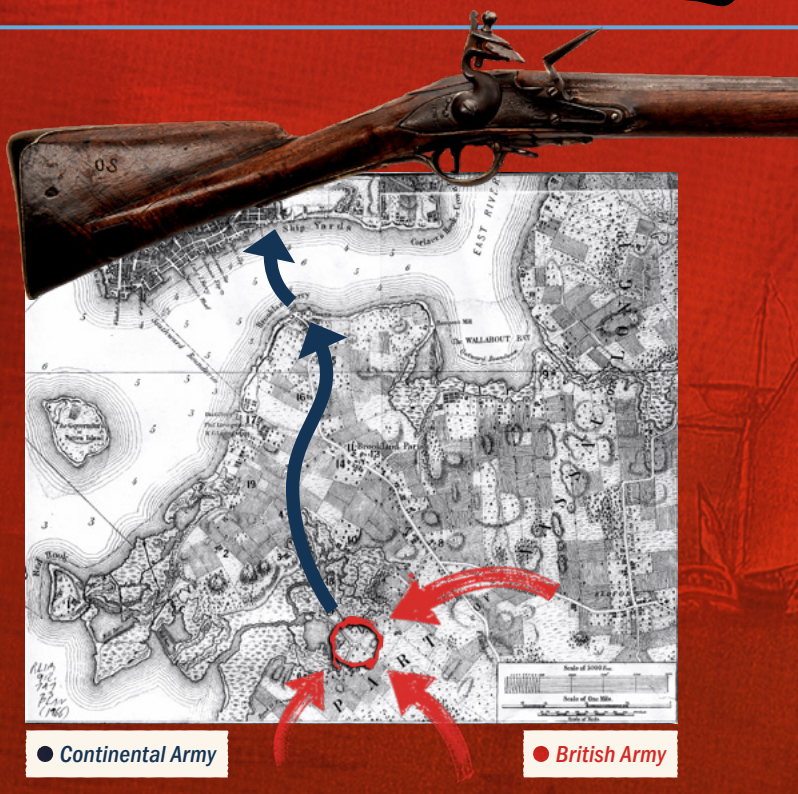
BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND
August 27, 1776

After forcing the British to evacuate Boston in March 1776, General Washington anticipated a British attack against New York. On August 22 the British began landing 15,000–20,000 British Regulars and Hessian mercenaries on Long Island, going up against just 9,000–10,000 soldiers of the Continental Army. On the night of August 26 and the morning of August 27, the British, aided by Loyalists and coerced locals, outflanked the American line and overwhelmed their position, forcing them to regroup behind the Brooklyn Heights. Washington knew that escaping Long Island with his army intact would require a miracle.

1776 JUN JUL AUG

WASHINGTON GETS HIS MIRACLE
August 29, 1776

Surrounded at Brooklyn Heights, George Washington knew his army had to escape across the East River without alerting nearby British forces. On the night of August 29, 1776, a thick fog concealed the movement as 9,000 men, along with artillery and supplies, were ferried safely to Manhattan. Washington was the last to depart, still hidden by fog. Though New York City remained in British hands, the daring retreat preserved the Continental Army and kept the fight for independence alive.



Background:
The Forcing of the Hudson River Passage
Thomas Mitchell (1735-1790)

The Battle of Trenton & Princeton



Battle of Long Island, a National Guard Heritage Painting by Domenick D'Andrea, courtesy of the National Guard Bureau

WASHINGTON CROSSES THE DELAWARE

December 25–26, 1776

After crushing defeats and a desperate retreat from New York, across New Jersey and into Pennsylvania, the Continental Army was battered and near collapse. Washington knew the Revolution might die without a bold strike. On Christmas night, 1776, he led a perilous crossing of the icy Delaware River, surprising and overwhelming the Hessian forces at Trenton. Days later, Washington outflanked and defeated British forces at Princeton. These two stunning victories electrified the colonies, shocked the British, and proved America's fight for independence was far from over.

SEP OCT NOV DEC



OBJECTS OF HISTORY

BRITISH BROWN BESS MUSKET

SCAN TO UNLOCK THE PRAGERU VAULT AND LEARN MORE

Courtesy of ***American Journey Experience***

This British Brown Bess Musket is inscribed with the royal crown and the initials "GR," standing for "Georgius Rex" or King George. This is the symbol for British-manufactured firearms in this era. This style of weapon would have been used on both sides during the American Revolution!

Turning Point

The Campaign of 1777



The March to Valley Forge, December 19, 1777, Painted by William Brooke Thomas Trego. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1883.

THE PHILADELPHIA CAMPAIGN
July 1777–June 1778

After the victories at Trenton and Princeton, 1777 brought crushing setbacks for Washington's Continental Army. Defeats at Germantown and Brandywine allowed the British to seize Philadelphia, forcing Congress to flee.

Washington's army retreated to Valley Forge for the winter, where it would endure intense starvation and deprivation. Their resolve was tested; the choice before them was either to abandon the fight or endure.

1776 **1777**

THE SARATOGA CAMPAIGN
July–October 1777

In July 1777, British General John Burgoyne led 8,000 troops from Canada down Lake Champlain toward Albany, aiming to cut New England off from the other colonies. American generals Philip Schuyler and Benedict Arnold repelled his progress, leaving Burgoyne stranded at Saratoga. Outnumbered, Burgoyne beat Horatio Gates's Continental soldiers in the first battle on September 18, but suffered heavy losses. Gates struck back on October 7 with a decisive victory, forcing Burgoyne to surrender his entire army ten days later.

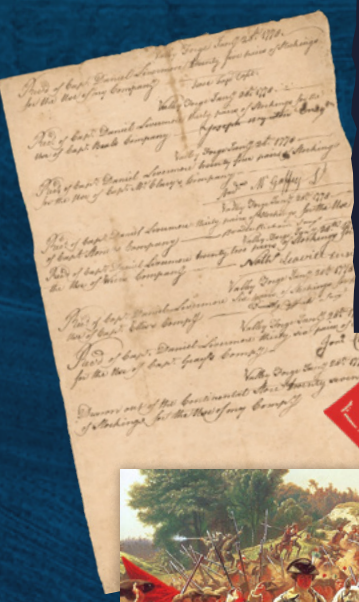


Surrender of General Burgoyne, John Trumbull, 1821

THE FRENCH ALLIANCE
February 1778

From the war's start, France secretly supplied the Continental Army but avoided a formal alliance. After the Battle of Saratoga, that changed.

In February 1778, France signed treaties with America and joined the war, providing supplies and troops—and the protection of the French Navy—to aid the Continental Army.



OBJECTS OF HISTORY

VALLEY FORGE REQUISITION RECEIPT

SCAN TO UNLOCK THE PRAGERU VAULT AND LEARN MORE

*Courtesy of **American Journey Experience***

This manuscript bears the signatures of officers representing seven companies of the 3rd New Hampshire Regiment. Each officer acknowledged receipt of various quantities of stockings for the use of their company. Each entry is dated at Valley Forge, January 28, 1778, and appears to be in the hand of Captain Daniel Livermore (Commander of the 4th Company), who distributed the stockings. In the final entry, Livermore notes that he drew 27 pairs of stockings from the Continental Store "for the use of my Comp'y."

The Closing Battles



Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth, Emanuel Leutze (c. 1851–1854)

THE BATTLE OF MONMOUTH
JUNE 28, 1778

In 1778, the British abandoned Philadelphia to consolidate their forces in New York. General Washington gave chase, and his army caught them at Monmouth, New Jersey. Despite seeming defeat, Washington rallied his men on the battlefield, inspiring them to fight. The inconclusive but intense battle proved the growing effectiveness of the Continental Army.

1778 — 1779

THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN
1776–1781

Assuming strong Loyalist support in the South, the British turned to that region, seizing Savannah, Georgia, in December 1778 and Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1780. The Continental Army won battles at King's Mountain and Cowpens, which stalled the British advance.

Undeterred, the British army under General Lord Charles Cornwallis moved across North Carolina and fought its way into Virginia. By the summer of 1781, American forces led by General Marquis de Lafayette were battling Cornwallis across the colony and pushing him toward coastal defenses—and the possibility of a trap.



The Battle of Cowpens, William Ranney (1845)

Background:
Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth
Emanuel Leutze
(c. 1851-1854)

Victory
ON THE BATTLEFIELD

THE WAR HAD ENDED.
A NATION HAD BEGUN.

Cornwallis Surrenders At Yorktown

OCTOBER 19, 1781

After suffering key losses in Virginia, British General Charles Cornwallis retreated to Yorktown and fortified that port city, expecting reinforcements by sea. General Marquis de Lafayette, acting on Washington's orders, moved his troops to hold British forces there while General Washington and French Commander Rochambeau led their armies south to join the attack. A French fleet blocked any rescue by sea, while allied troops cut off escape by land. For the next three weeks, the combined American and French armies besieged Cornwallis's men.

Completely trapped, Cornwallis surrendered on October 19, 1781. During the ceremony, the British reportedly played, "The World Turned Upside Down." This decisive victory by the Continental Army effectively ended the American Revolutionary War, though minor skirmishes continued for nearly two more years before peace was declared.



"Surrender of Lord Cornwallis", October 19, 1781, John Trumbull (1820)



American Commissioners of the Preliminary Peace Negotiations with Great Britain, Benjamin West (1783)

Treaty of Paris

SEPTEMBER 3, 1783

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 River, north of Florida, and south of Canada, plus the fishing rights off Newfoundland and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. 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. American independence was no longer a dream. It was the law of nations. When urged by Colonel Lewis Nicola to become king, Washington rejected the idea with "abhorrence." Like the Roman Cincinnatus, he longed to return home after eight years of command. By resigning his commission on December 23, 1783, he established the principle of civilian rule. King George later called him "the greatest character of the age."

TO Secure THESE RIGHTS

Preamble of the United States Constitution

The new Constitution aimed to uphold the rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, addressing the colonial grievances that had arisen under British rule. It would separate and limit governmental powers, preventing absolute authority and ensuring governance by consent.

The Constitution places the legislative power of the United States in Congress, an elected body consisting of a Senate and a House of Representatives, so that the people's representatives make and pass our laws. It places the executive power of the United States in the president, who is to be elected every four years along with a vice president, whose primary responsibility is to enforce the law and protect and defend the Constitution. And it places the judicial power of the United States in the Supreme Court along with lower courts, entrusting them to handle cases under federal law.

The Constitution also describes the relationship between the states and the federal government, sets up the process of amending the Constitution, and declares the Constitution to be the supreme law of the land.

The Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787, and sent to the states for ratification.

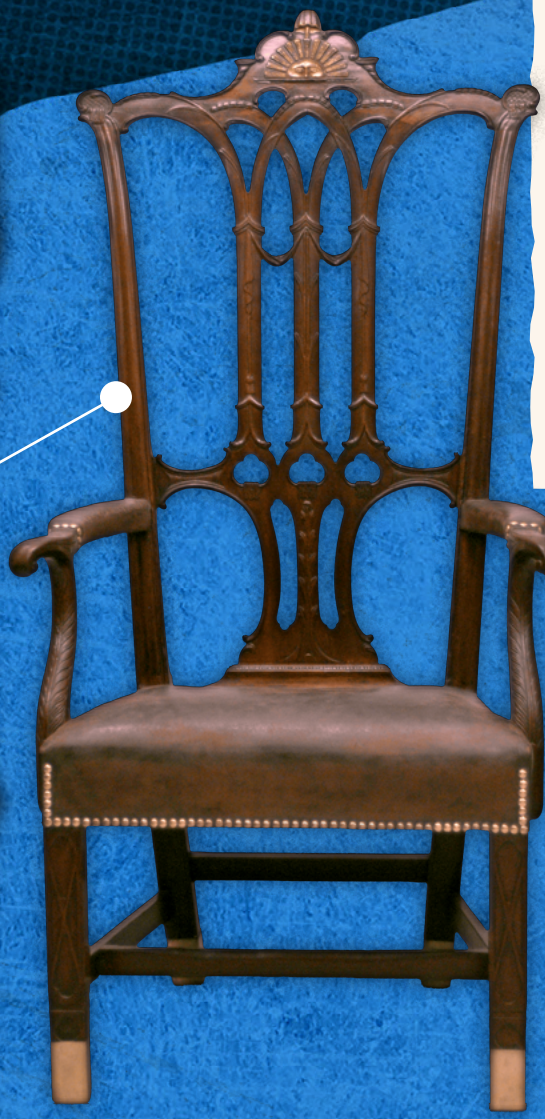


Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States
Howard Chandler Christy (1940)

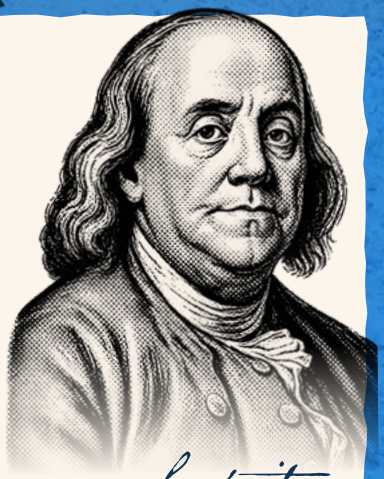
WE THE PEOPLE

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.





As Benjamin Franklin said in 1787, the Founders had given America a republic, "if you can keep it." Establishing a republic is difficult but maintaining it is even harder. The Founders needed a frame of government that would preserve their hard-fought liberty. They looked to the Declaration of Independence as the basis of this republican government.



A Republic, if you can keep it.

OBJECTS OF HISTORY

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S CHAIR

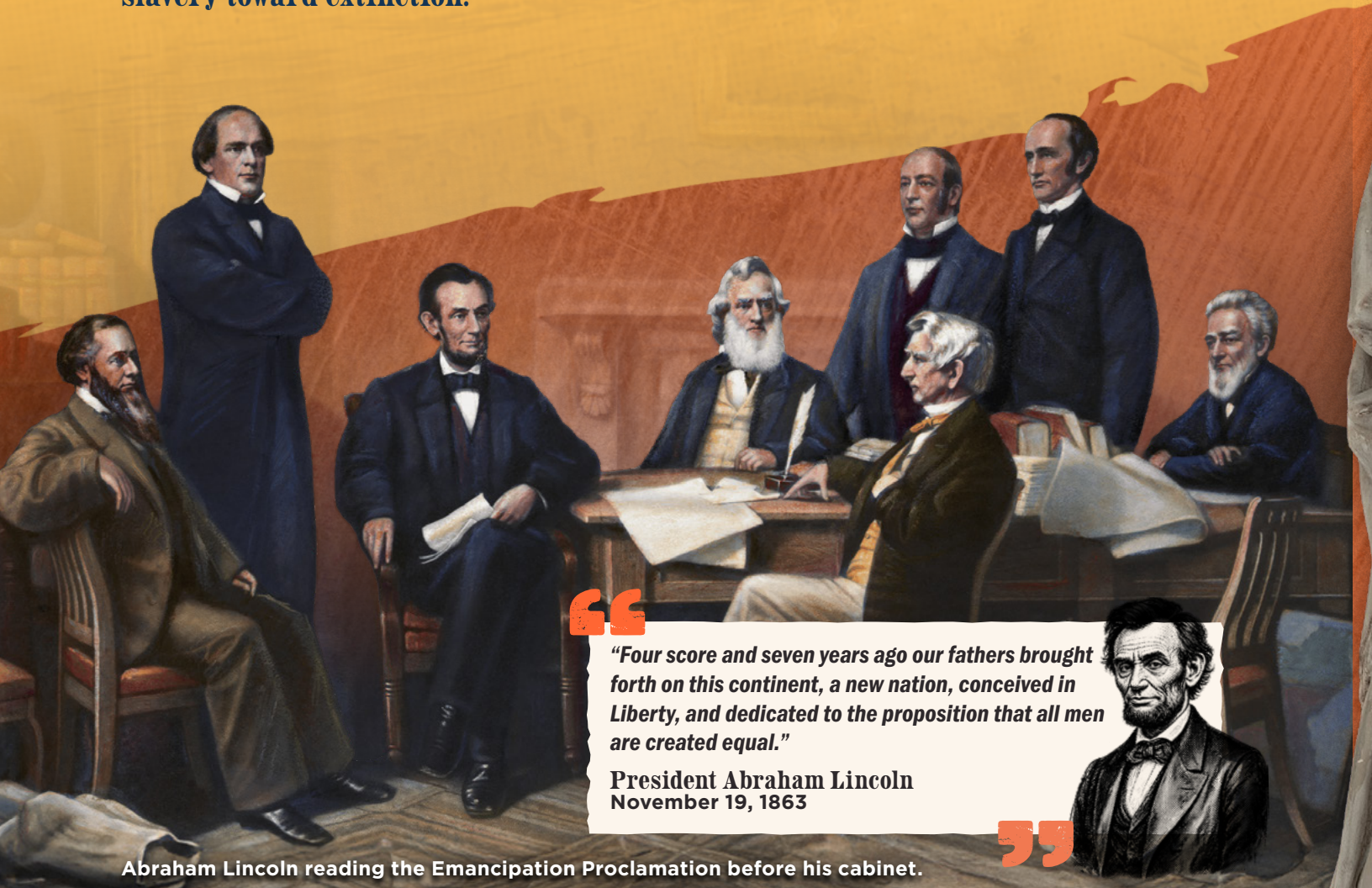
George Washington used this chair throughout the nearly three months of the Constitutional Convention. Benjamin Franklin is credited with immortalizing the chair at the close of the convention, observing:

"I have often looked at that picture behind the president without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting. But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun."

THE *Promise* OF LIBERTY

The American Founding is the greatest experiment in liberty the world has yet seen. The Declaration of Independence recognized the "self-evident" truths that "all men are created equal" and equally endowed with fundamental rights. It would take the new nation nearly a century to fulfill these truths and secure these rights for a large segment of the American population.

The Founders anticipated that slavery would decline and wither away, and many states began restricting and abolishing slavery. In the original draft of the Declaration, Jefferson called the slave trade a "cruel war against human nature itself." That language was removed to pass the Declaration, but the signers succeeded in establishing the principle of human equality that would drive slavery toward extinction.



> *"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."*
>
> President Abraham Lincoln
> November 19, 1863

Abraham Lincoln reading the Emancipation Proclamation before his cabinet. Engraving by Alexander Hay Ritchie, after a painting by Francis Carpenter

OBJECTS OF HISTORY

THE FUGITIVE STORY SCULPTURE

SCAN TO UNLOCK
THE PRAGERU VAULT
AND LEARN MORE

Courtesy of ***American Journey Experience***

The 1869 sculpture by John Rogers honors the abolitionist movement and features John Greenleaf Whittier, Henry Ward Beecher, and William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison denounced the Constitution as a slave document, but his former protégé Frederick Douglass studied the document and concluded—like Lincoln before him—that the Constitution was not pro-slavery. The revival of that argument marked a turning point in the abolition movement.



Saving PRINCIPLES

Congress abolished the slave trade in 1807, but Southern interests defended the institution. Abolitionists looked to the Declaration of Independence in their efforts to oppose slavery. Under President Lincoln, the Civil War was fought to preserve the Union and to end slavery.

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring enslaved people in rebellious states "free." The Union's victory, along with the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, secured freedom and citizenship for enslaved Americans and laid the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century.



"The Fourth of July is the first great fact in your nation's history—the very ring-bolt in the chain of your yet undeveloped destiny. Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation's destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost."

Frederick Douglass
"What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"
July 5, 1852

A Promissory Note

The Declaration of Independence has guided every American freedom movement and inspired many globally. Martin Luther King Jr. called it a "promissory note" guaranteeing liberty and equality for all. The Civil Rights Movement sought to hold the nation to that promise, challenging Jim Crow laws and segregation. In 1954, Brown v. Board of Education struck down school segregation, ruling that "such segregation is a denial of the equal protection of the laws."

The decision energized the Civil Rights Movement. Peaceful protests by King, Rosa Parks, and others led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, advancing the Declaration's promise of equality.

WE STILL *Hold* THESE *Truths*

Americans have long fought to uphold the Declaration of Independence's recognition of inherent, God-given rights—rights that no government can take away.

Although Abigail Adams urged her husband, John, to "remember the ladies," it would take more than a century for women to gain full civic participation. In 1876, suffragettes, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, turned to the Declaration to demand equal rights under the law. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, finally recognizing women's right to vote.

The Declaration has guided many liberty struggles—from women's suffrage to fighting tyranny in World War II and the Cold War. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy reminded Americans that "the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God." Today, the Declaration still calls Americans to defend freedom and uphold equal rights.

> ***"That Declaration whose yellowing parchment and fading, almost illegible lines I saw the past week in the National Archives in Washington is still a revolutionary document... For that Declaration unleashed not merely a revolution against the British, but a revolution in human affairs."***
>
> **John F. Kennedy**
> ***Address at Independence Hall***
> **July 4, 1962**





> ***"When the architects of our Great Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."***
>
> **Martin Luther King Jr.**
> ***"I Have a Dream"***
> **August 28, 1963**

Joining THE Union

How 13 Colonies Became 50 States

When the 13 colonies declared independence, they became the first states and laid the foundation for the new nation. After the Revolution, Britain ceded land west of the Appalachian Mountains and east of the Mississippi River, doubling the young republic's size.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, later affirmed by the Constitution, established a legal process for the new territories to join the Union. Once recognized and populated, territories could draft constitutions and seek Congress's approval for statehood. Importantly, the ordinance banned slavery in those territories, making it the first major national law to do so and setting a precedent for the future. This process led to the admission of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

In 1803, the Louisiana Purchase added 828,000 square miles, opening the Midwest, Great Plains, and Rockies. Later treaties expanded America's borders: the Adams-Onís Treaty brought Florida, the Oregon Treaty secured the Pacific Northwest, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo added the Southwest and California. Congress annexed Texas in 1845, and the Homestead Act of 1862 fueled western settlements in states such as Colorado, the Dakotas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.

Between 1791 and 1959, 37 states joined the original 13, ending with Alaska and Hawaii. Each state developed a distinct history, culture, and industry, yet all remain united by one Constitution and the principles of liberty, equality, and consent of the governed as proclaimed in 1776.



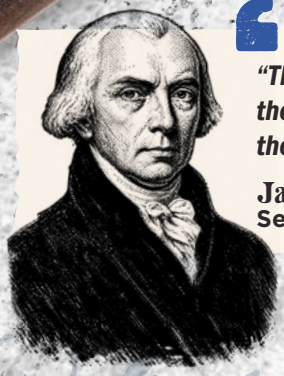
OBJECTS OF HISTORY

WELLS FARGO SHOTGUN

SCAN TO UNLOCK THE PRAGERU VAULT AND LEARN MORE

*Courtesy of **American Journey Experience***

This authentic Wells Fargo shotgun represents the grit and danger of the American frontier. Carried by express agents guarding stagecoaches filled with gold, mail, and valuables, it became an enduring symbol of security in the Wild West.



> *"The happy union of these States is a wonder; their Constitution a miracle; their example the hope of Liberty throughout the World."*
>
> **James Madison**
> **September 1, 1829**

THE NORTHWEST ORDINANCE

"Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged. The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent..."



Exploring Our Founding Documents

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

p. 64

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

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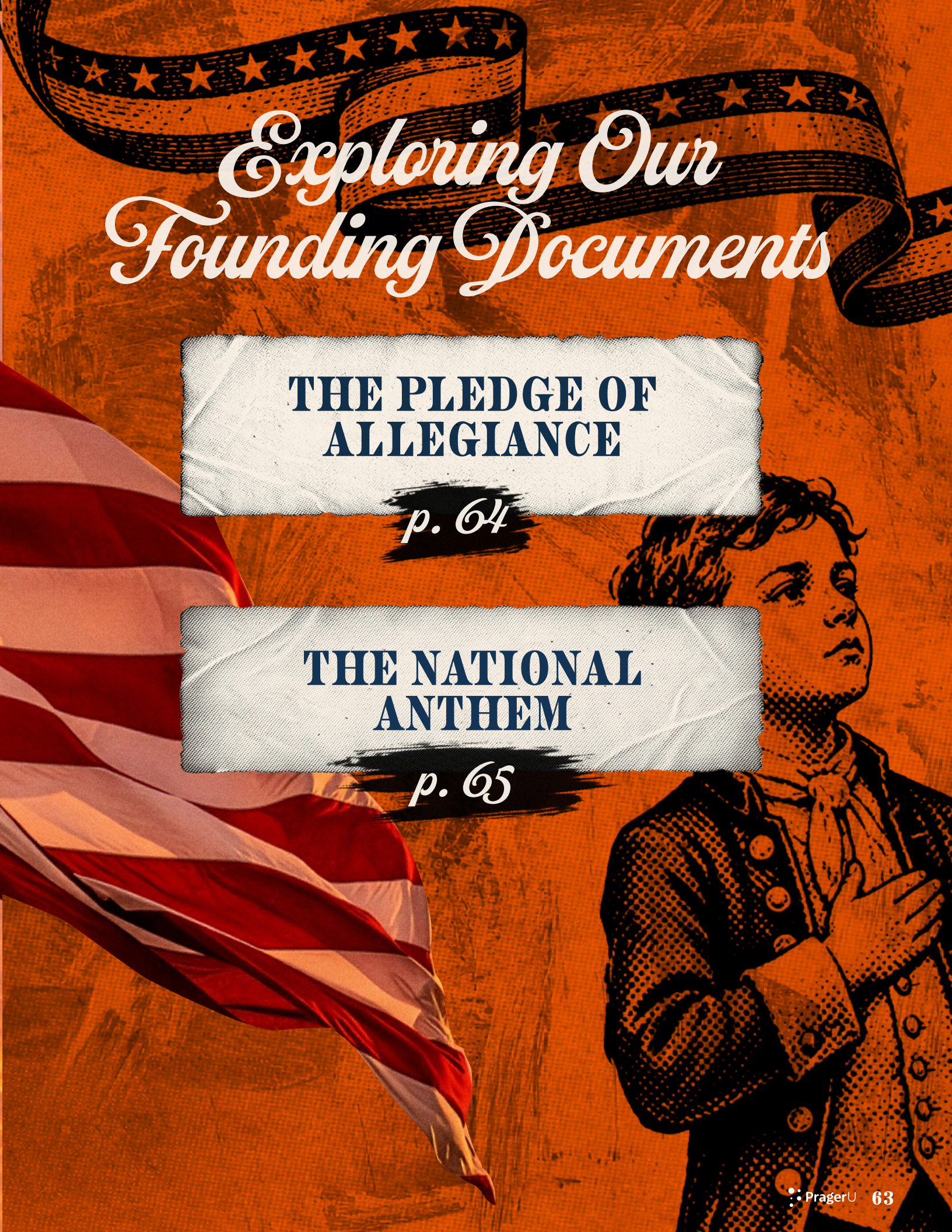

The Pledge of Allegiance

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.

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" during the Cold War in 1954.



Schoolchildren in 1899 reciting the Pledge of Allegiance



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.

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 bombs 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 footsteps' 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 Signers of the Declaration of Independence

OVERVIEW

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

SIGNERS BY STATE

To explore the extended biographies of each signer, scan the QR codes to watch video profiles and view 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.

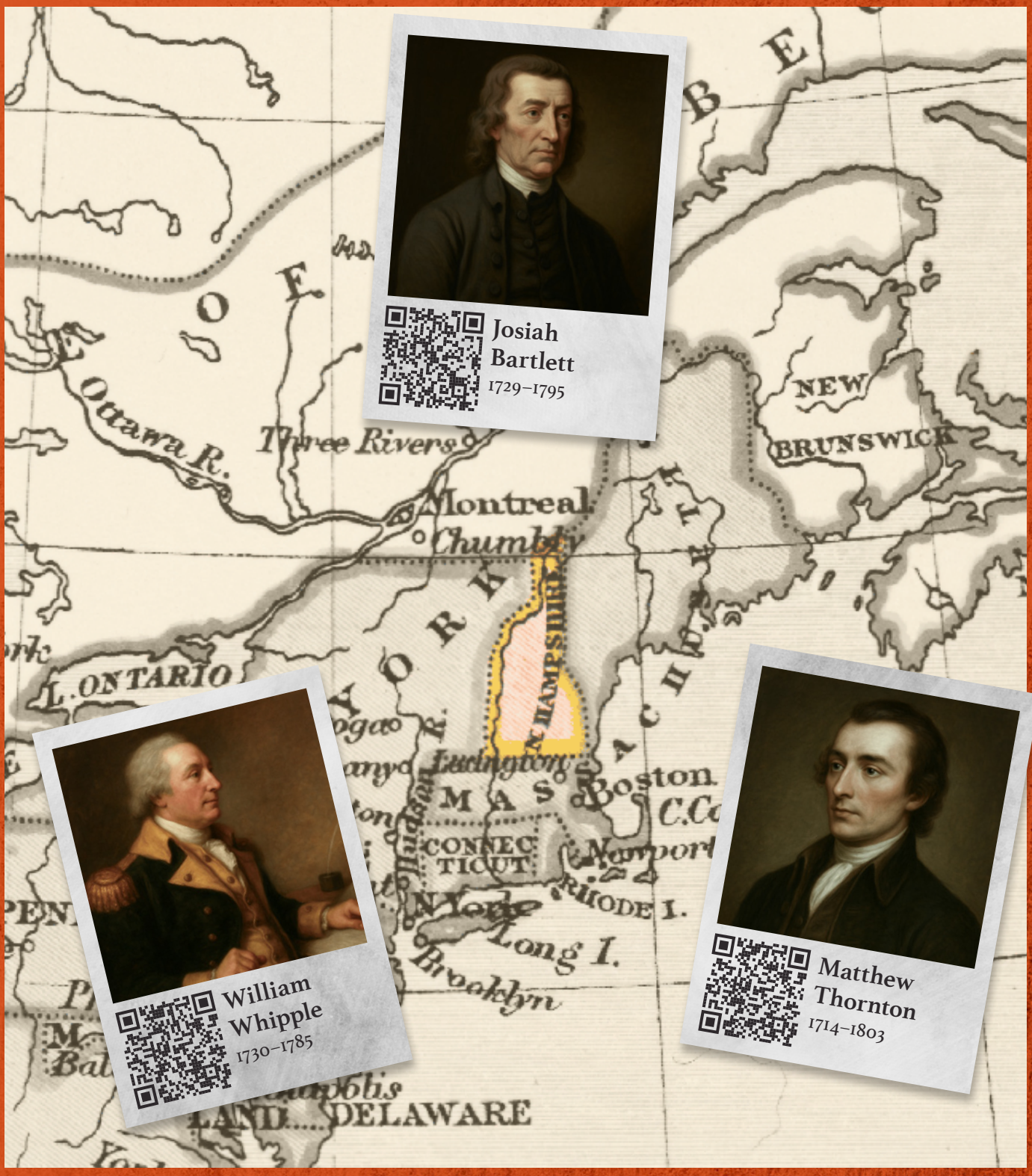
Their act of defiance ignited a revolution. Their words reshaped the world. And their sacrifices laid the foundation for the freedoms Americans cherish today.

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

New Hampshire

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





Josiah Bartlett

1729–1795

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Josiah Bartlett was a physician who pioneered new ways to treat common ailments such as fevers and diphtheria. But Bartlett's influence extended beyond his medical practice. He became a fervent advocate for American independence and, at the signing of the Declaration, Bartlett reportedly "made the rafters shake with the loudness of his approval."

Bartlett played a key role in drafting the New Hampshire state constitution and later served as the state's first governor.

Scan to watch a video about Josiah Bartlett.

William Whipple

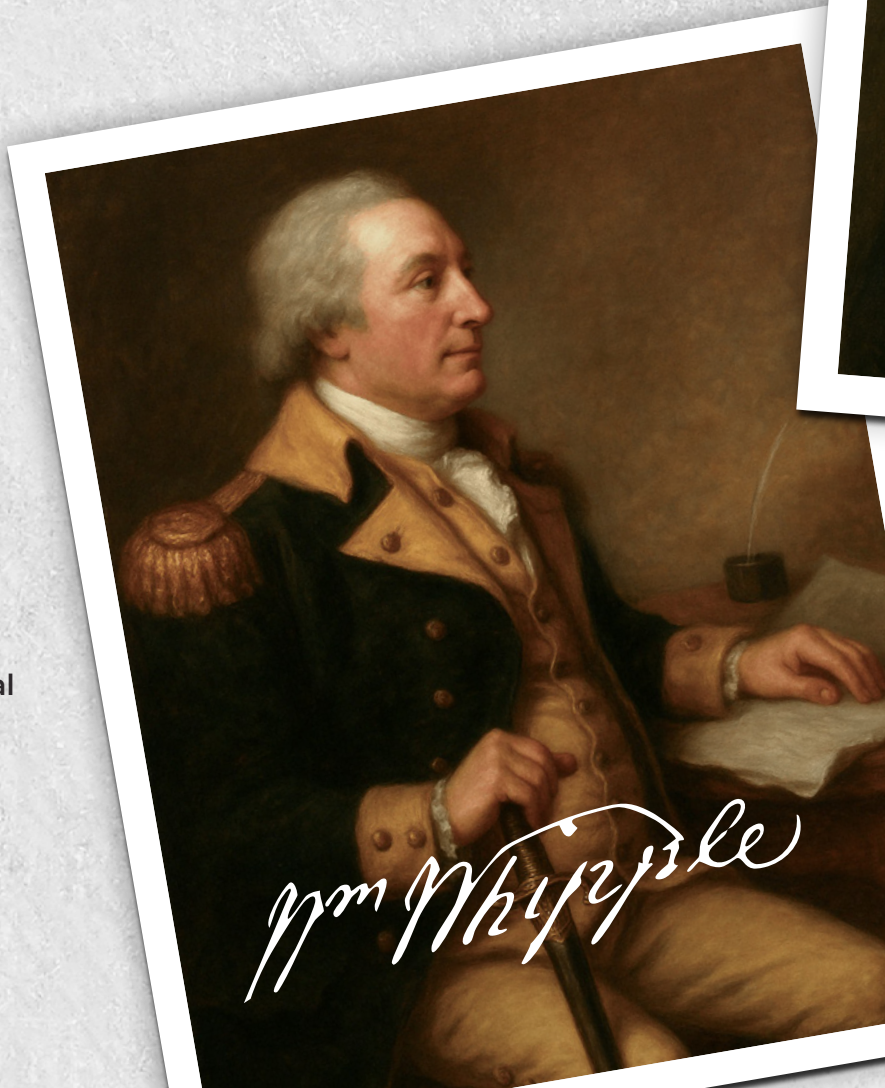
1730–1785

NEW HAMPSHIRE

William Whipple was a leading citizen of Portsmouth, helped elect delegates to the Continental Congress, and was elected to the Provincial Congress. He won seats in both the New Hampshire legislature and the Continental Congress and voted for independence on July 4 and signed the Declaration on August 2.

Whipple was appointed Brigadier General of the New Hampshire militia, led four regiments during the Battle of Saratoga, and helped negotiate surrender terms with the British.

Scan to watch a video about William Whipple.



Matthew Thornton



1714–1803

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Matthew Thornton served as a surgeon for the New Hampshire militia during King George's War. His reputation led to his election in 1758 to the colonial legislature, where he became a vocal critic of British Parliament.

Thornton was later named president of the New Hampshire Provincial Congress. As president, he urged citizens to take up arms, citing British cruelty and civilian suffering.

Thornton was appointed a delegate to the Continental Congress in September of 1776 and became the last signer 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."

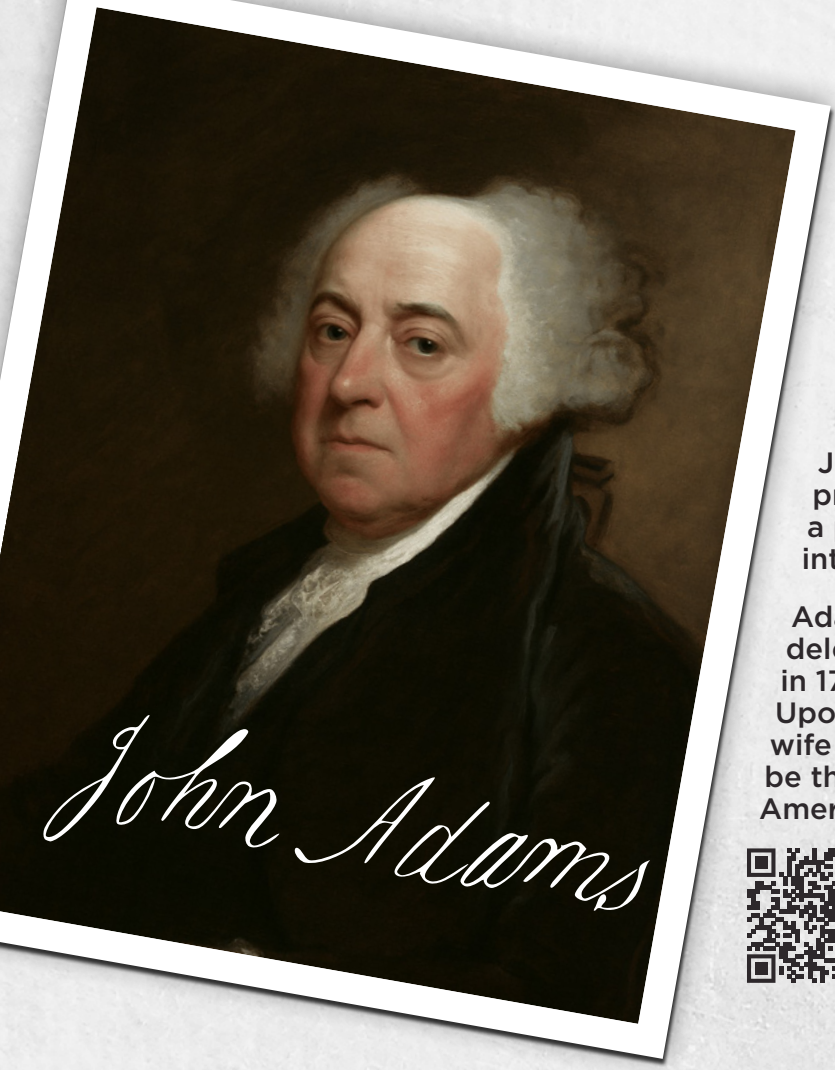
Scan to watch a video about Matthew Thornton.

SIGNERS BY STATE

Massachusetts

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





John Adams

1735–1826

MASSACHUSETTS

John Adams served as vice president, the first president to live in the White House, and was a political philosopher whose writings and intellect were vital to American independence.

Adams was selected as a Massachusetts delegate to the Second Continental Congress in 1775, where he helped draft the Declaration. Upon signing the Declaration, Adams wrote to his wife Abigail, "The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America."

Scan to watch a video about John Adams.

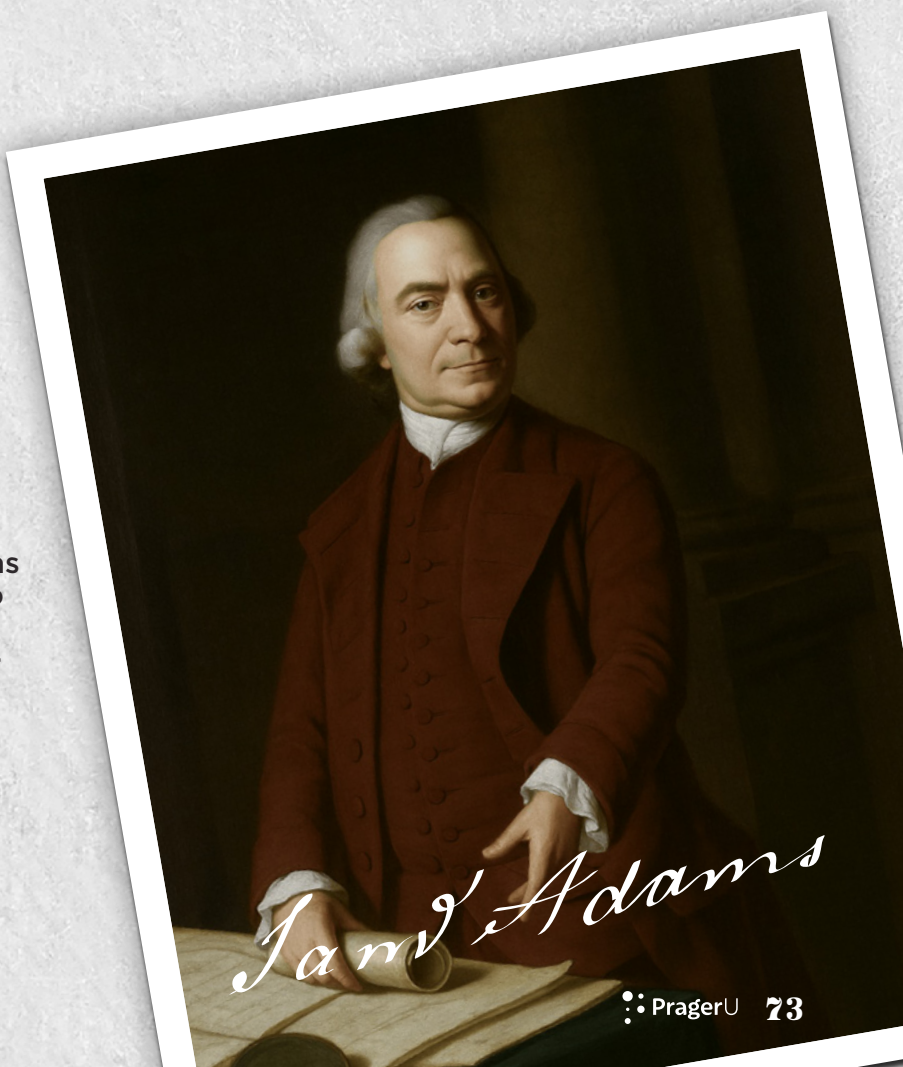
Samuel Adams

1722–1803

MASSACHUSETTS

Samuel Adams, a second cousin of John Adams, was a founding member of the Sons of Liberty who organized the Boston Tea Party. Adams participated in the First & Second Continental Congress, and signed the Declaration in 1776. 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—except Sam Adams and John Hancock. Adams helped draft the Massachusetts state constitution and served as the commonwealth's fourth governor.

Scan to watch a video about Samuel Adams.





Robert Treat Paine

1731–1814

MASSACHUSETTS

Robert Treat Paine was elected to the Continental Congress, and in 1776, he signed the Declaration. He was later elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives where he served as Speaker and helped draft the state constitution. He also became the state's first Attorney General and served as a Massachusetts Supreme Court Justice.

Later in life, Paine co-founded the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Scan to watch our video about Robert Treat Paine.

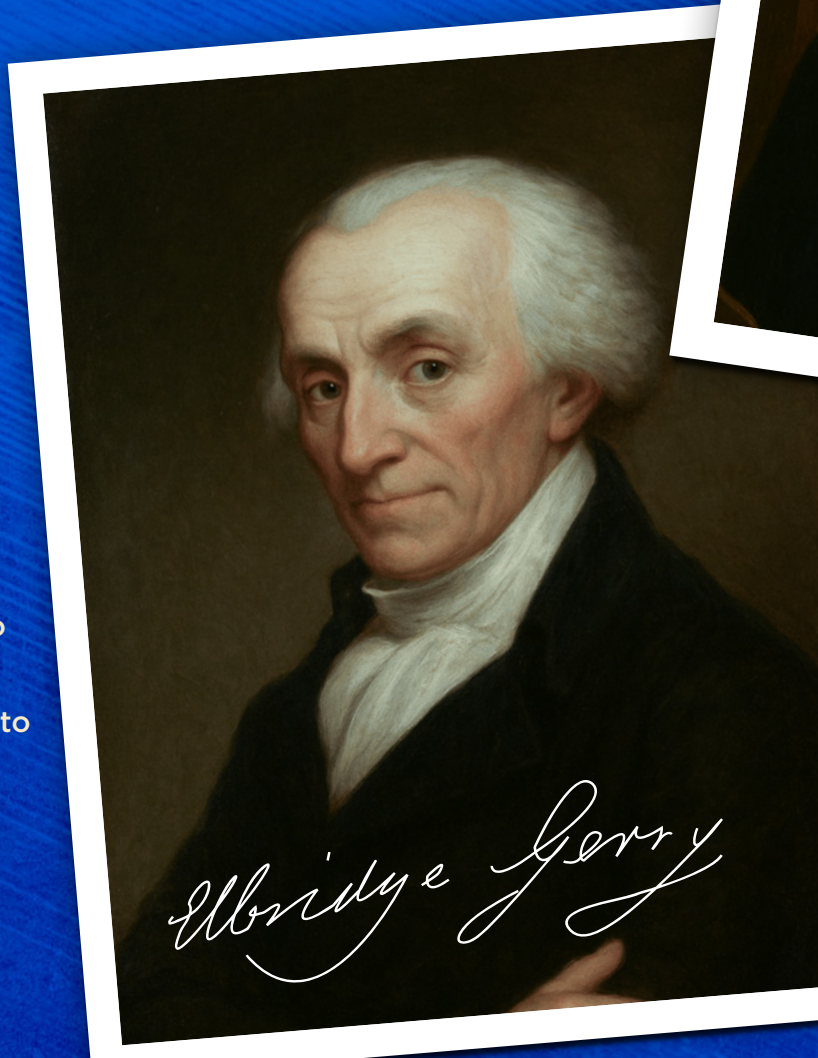
Elbridge Gerry

1744–1814

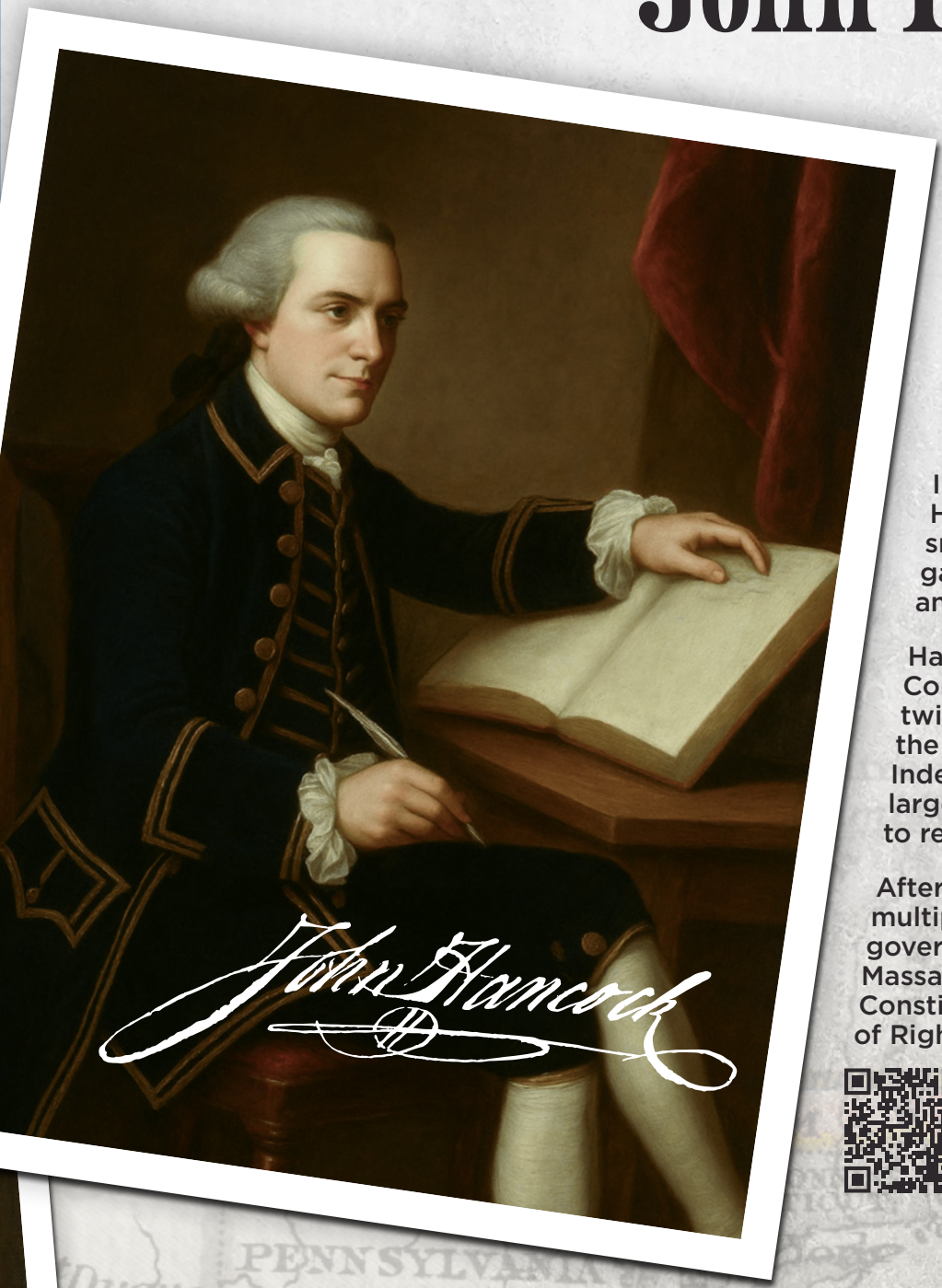
MASSACHUSETTS

Elbridge Gerry was a merchant, politician, and the fifth vice president of the United States under James Madison. A member of the Second Continental Congress, he signed the Declaration of Independence and served until 1780. He chaired the committee that helped forge the Great Compromise, which created a bicameral legislature with popular representation in the U.S. House and equal representation in the Senate. Gerry refused to sign the Constitution without a Bill of Rights, fearing centralized power. As Governor of Massachusetts, his redistricting decisions led to the term "gerrymandering."

Scan to watch a video about Elbridge Gerry.



John Hancock



1737–1793
MASSACHUSETTS

John Hancock is widely remembered for his prominent signature on the Declaration of Independence. But his contributions to the Founding of the country extended far beyond ink on parchment.

In 1768, British officials seized Hancock's ship for allegedly smuggling wine. The event galvanized colonial resistance and raised Hancock's profile.

Hancock was elected to the Continental Congress, serving twice as its president. He became the first to sign the Declaration of Independence with a signature so large King George III would be able to read it without glasses.

After the war, Hancock served multiple terms as Massachusetts governor. He played a key role in Massachusetts' ratification of the U.S. Constitution and supported the Bill of Rights.

Scan to watch a video about John Hancock.

SIGNERS BY STATE

Rhode Island

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





Stephen Hopkins

1707–1785

RHODE ISLAND

Stephen Hopkins was a leading figure of early American patriotism and rose through colonial government ranks, serving as justice and later chief justice, of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. As colonial governor, he advocated banning the importation of slaves into Rhode Island.

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 and reportedly said, "My hand trembles, but my heart does not."

Scan to watch a video about Stephen Hopkins.

William Ellery

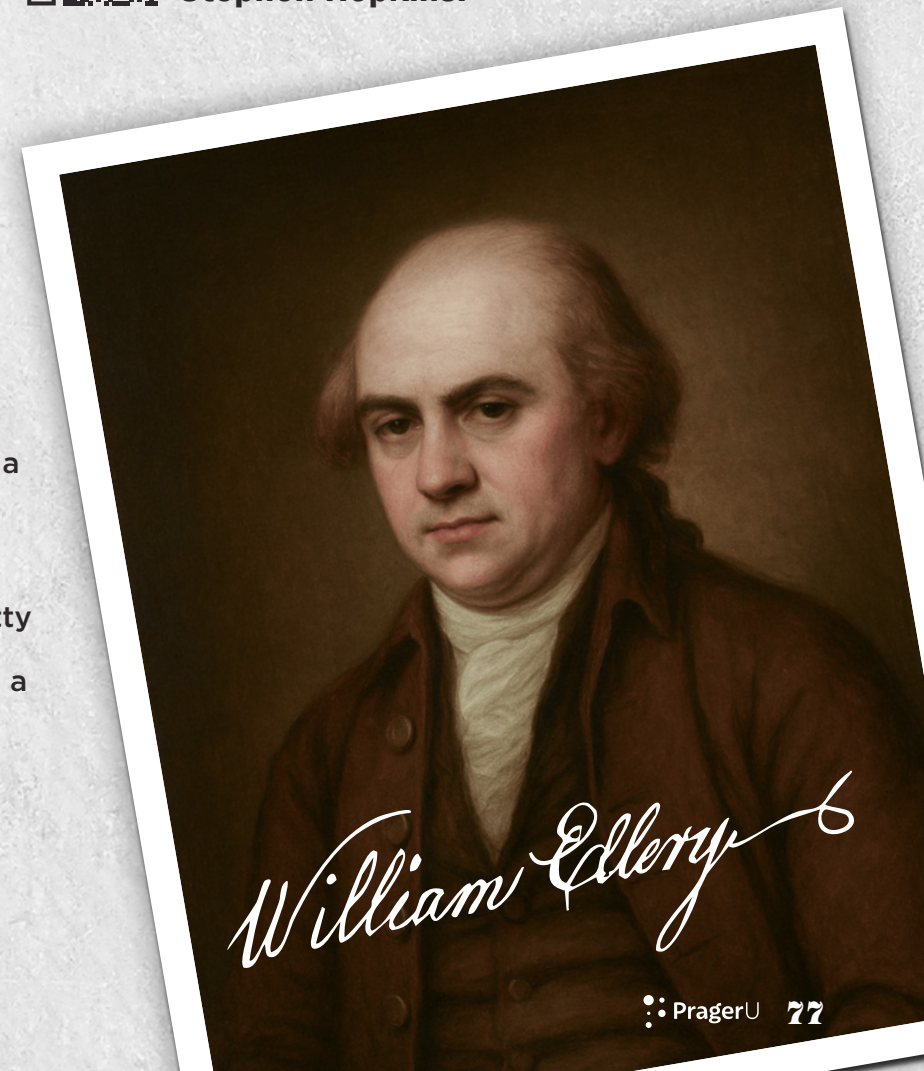
1727–1820

RHODE ISLAND

William Ellery followed in the footsteps of his father, a prominent merchant and a political leader.

Ellery was selected as a delegate to the First and Second Continental Congress, where he earned a reputation for his witty epigrams. Some accounts cite him as calling the Declaration of Independence a "Death Warrant."

Scan to watch a video about William Ellery.



SIGNERS BY STATE

Connecticut

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

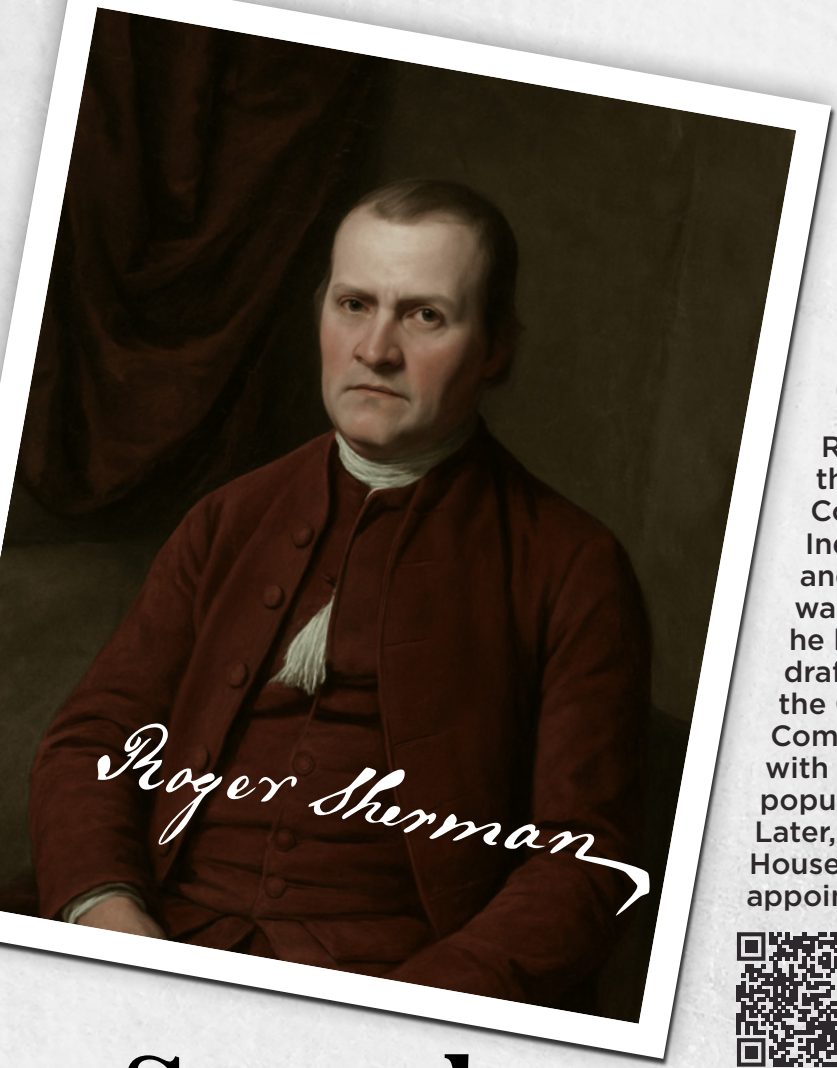


Roger Sherman
1721–1793

Samuel Huntington
1731–1796

William Williams
1731–1811

Oliver Wolcott
1726–1797



Roger Sherman

1721–1793

CONNECTICUT

Roger Sherman was the only person to sign the Continental Association from the first Continental Congress, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution. Sherman was appointed to the Committee of Five where he helped review and refine Thomas Jefferson's drafts of the Declaration. He also proposed at the Constitutional Convention the "Connecticut Compromise," establishing a bicameral legislature with equal state representation in the Senate and population-based representation in the House. Later, Sherman was elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, and in 1791, he was appointed to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate.

Scan to watch a video about Roger Sherman.

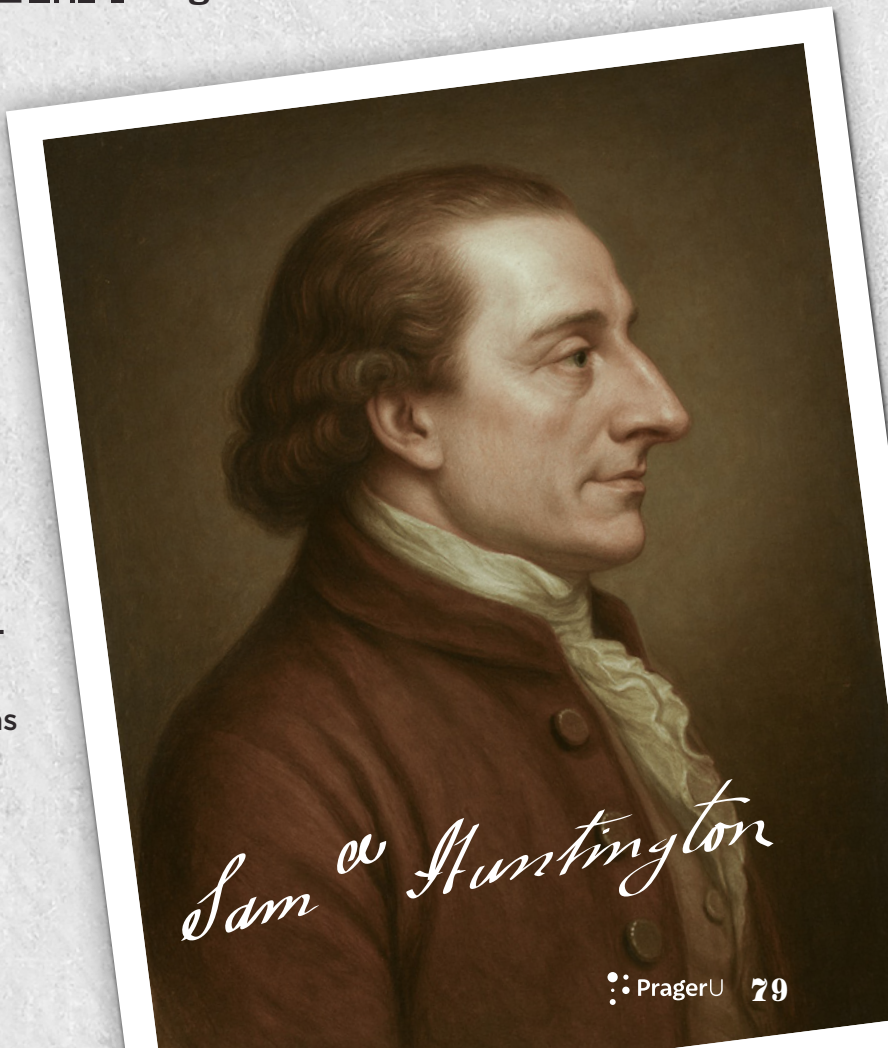
Samuel Huntington

1731–1796

CONNECTICUT

Samuel Huntington grew up on his family's 180-acre farm and early in his life apprenticed as a laborer making barrels and casks. Soon his interest turned toward law and he was admitted to the bar at age 23, earning such a strong reputation that he was appointed King's Attorney for Connecticut. He served two terms 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.

Scan to watch a video about Samuel Huntington.





William Williams

1731–1811

CONNECTICUT

William Williams served in the Continental Army during the French and Indian War, an experience that led to his deep distrust of the British. Williams was appointed to Congress in June 1776—too late to vote for independence. But he signed the Declaration in August. He later contributed to the Articles of Confederation. In 1788, he served as a delegate to Connecticut's constitutional ratifying convention, where he voted in favor of the U.S. Constitution.

Scan to watch a video about William Williams.

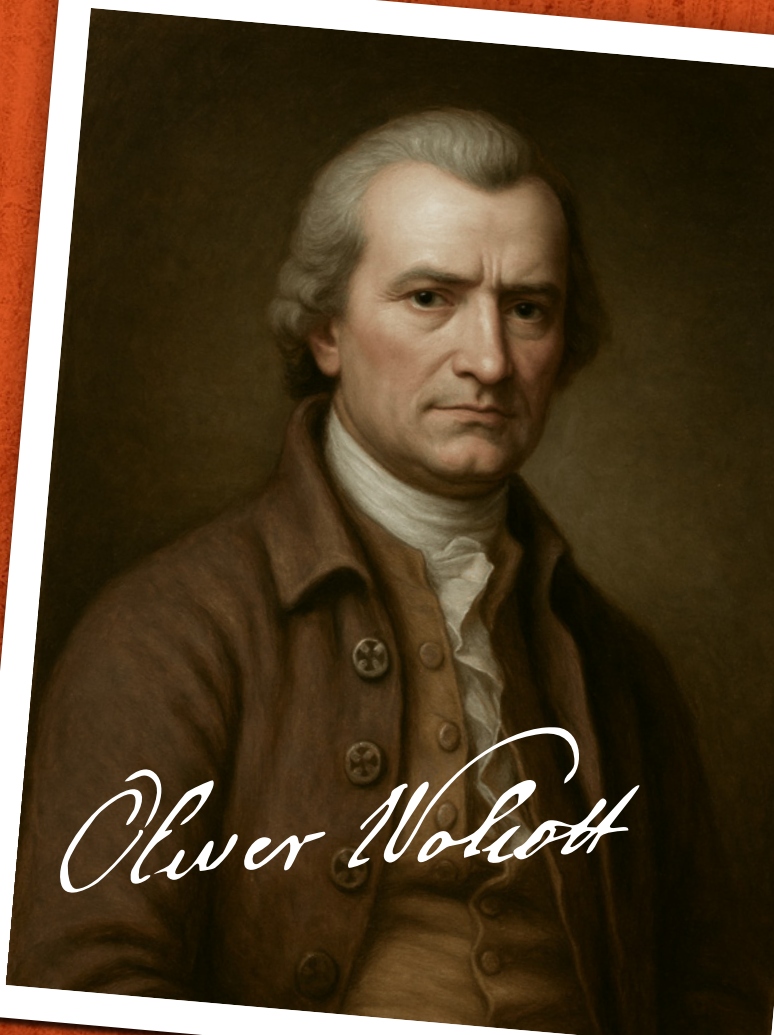
Oliver Wolcott

1726–1797

CONNECTICUT

Oliver Wolcott attended the Second Continental Congress in 1776, but was absent from the formal signing of the Declaration due to illness. He signed months later. Wolcott was in New York on July 9, 1776, when General George Washington read the Declaration of Independence to his troops, which led to a demonstration that toppled a statue of King George. Wolcott shipped the pieces of the statue to Connecticut, and back home, he, his family, and fellow Patriots melted the pieces and turned them into 42,088 bullets for the war effort. Following the signing of the Declaration, Wolcott was elected Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut in 1786, and Governor in 1796.

Scan to watch a video about Oliver Wolcott.



SIGNERS BY STATE

New York

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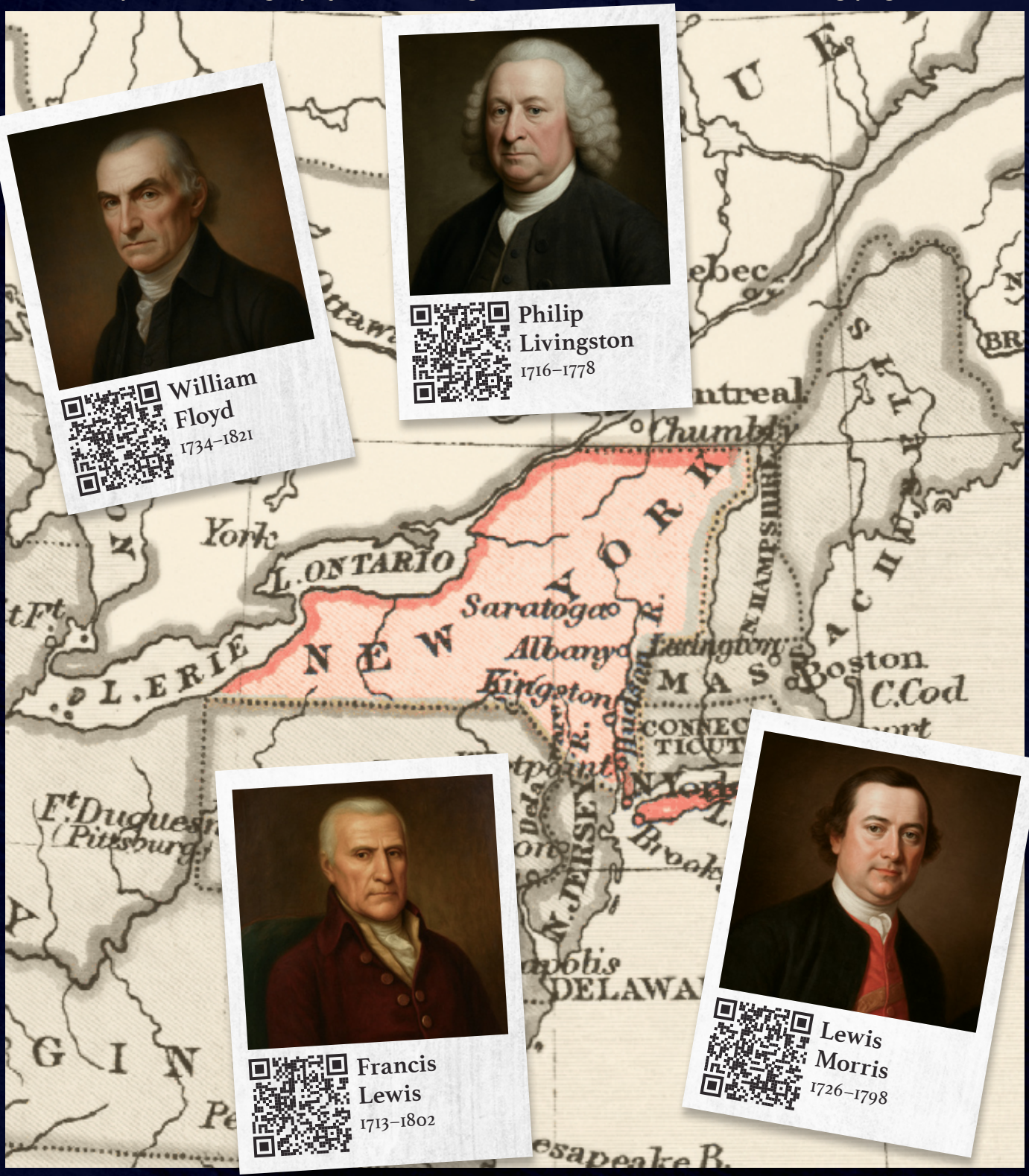

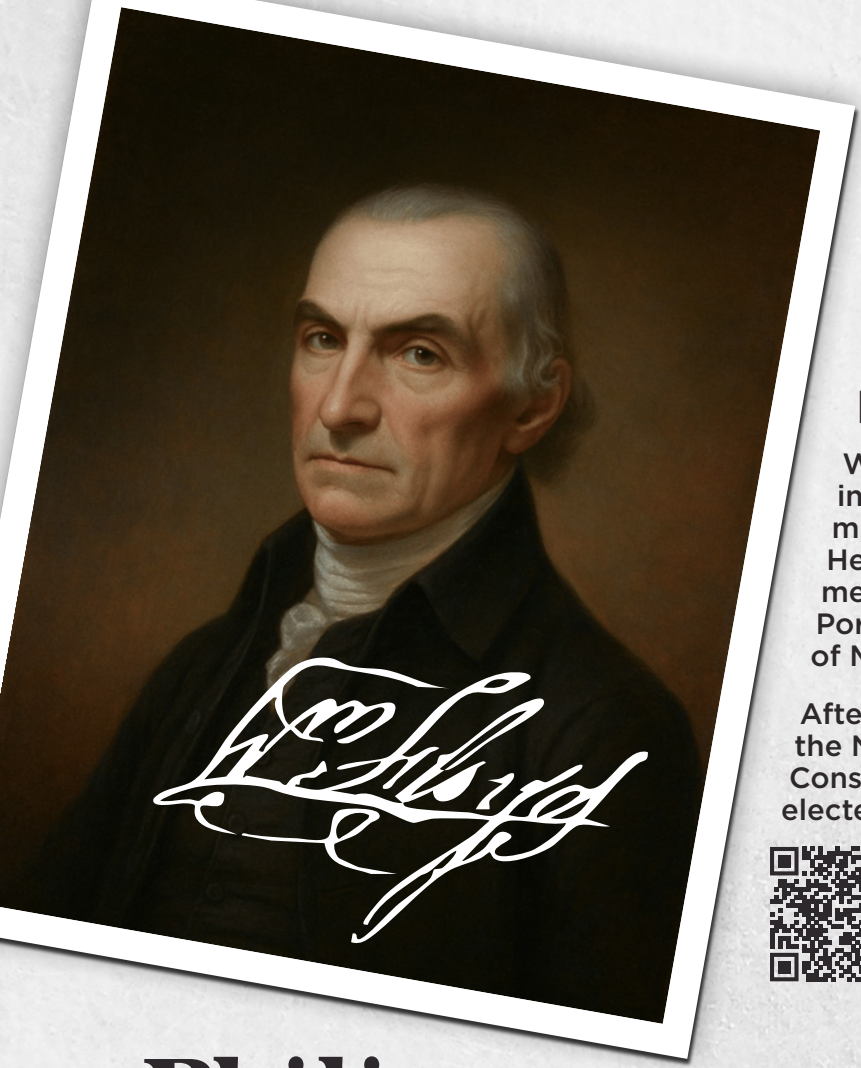

William Floyd

1734–1821

NEW YORK

William 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. During the war, he held the rank of Major General in the militia.

After the war, Floyd served several terms in the New York State Senate, participated in the Constitutional Convention of 1801, and was elected to the first U.S. Congress.

Scan to watch a video about William Floyd.

Philip Livingston

1716–1778

NEW YORK

Philip Livingston entered public life serving as an alderman and then elected representative within the British colonial government. By the 1760s, British taxes were unpopular with many American colonists and Livingston began to speak out publicly against them. Though he was largely skeptical of American independence, because of concerns of unprecedented levels of disorder, Livingston ultimately joined the rest of his colleagues and signed the Declaration of Independence one month late on August 2, 1776.

Scan to watch a 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 became active in colonial politics and protested the Stamp Act of 1765.

Scan to watch a video about Francis Lewis.

Lewis Morris

1726–1798

NEW YORK

Lewis Morris acquired properties in New York and New Jersey, which led him to become increasingly frustrated with British control over trade policies. He became a fierce proponent of independence. However, the provincial congress of New York was reluctant to endorse the cause wholeheartedly. Yet, Morris held firm. It wasn't until after all other colonies reached a consensus for independence that the New York delegation fully supported the cause.

Scan to watch a video about Lewis Morris.



SIGNERS BY STATE

Pennsylvania

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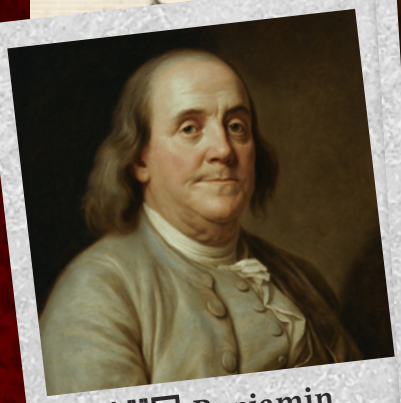


Benjamin Franklin
1706–1790



Robert Morris
1734–1806



John Morton
1725–1777



George Clymer
1739–1813



James Smith
1719–1806





George Taylor
1716–1781



George Ross
1730–1779

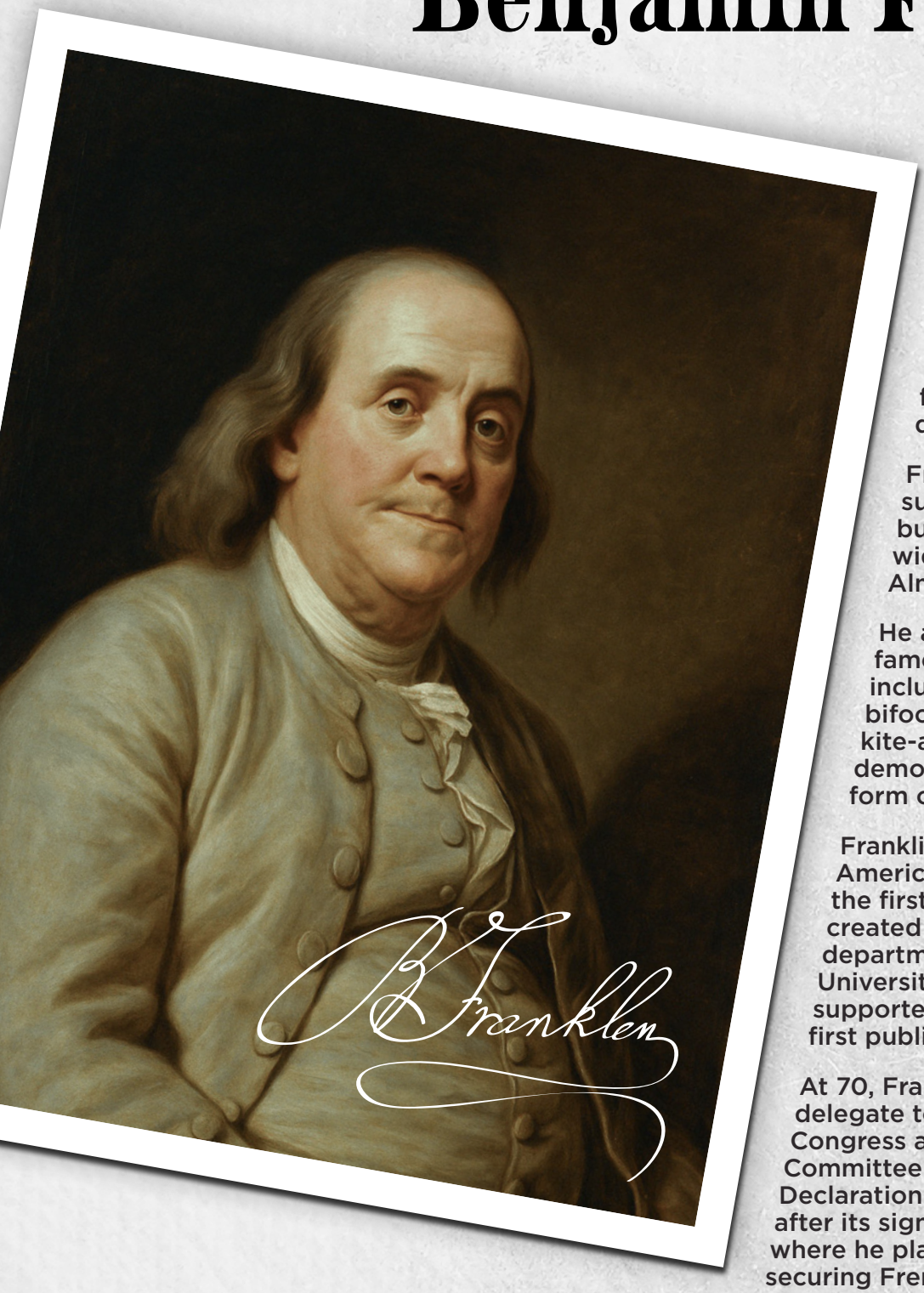


James Wilson
1742–1798



Dr. Benjamin Rush
1746–1813

Benjamin Franklin



1706–1790
PENNSYLVANIA

Benjamin Franklin 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.

Franklin launched a successful printing business and published the widely read Poor Richard's Almanack.

He also gained international fame for his inventions, including the lightning rod, bifocal glasses, and for his kite-and-key experiment, which demonstrated lightning as a form of electricity.

Franklin also helped build American civic life. He founded 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.

Scan to watch a video about Benjamin Franklin.

In 1787, Franklin served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and was 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."



John Morton

1725–1777

PENNSYLVANIA

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

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 on July 1, 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.

Scan to watch a video about John Morton.

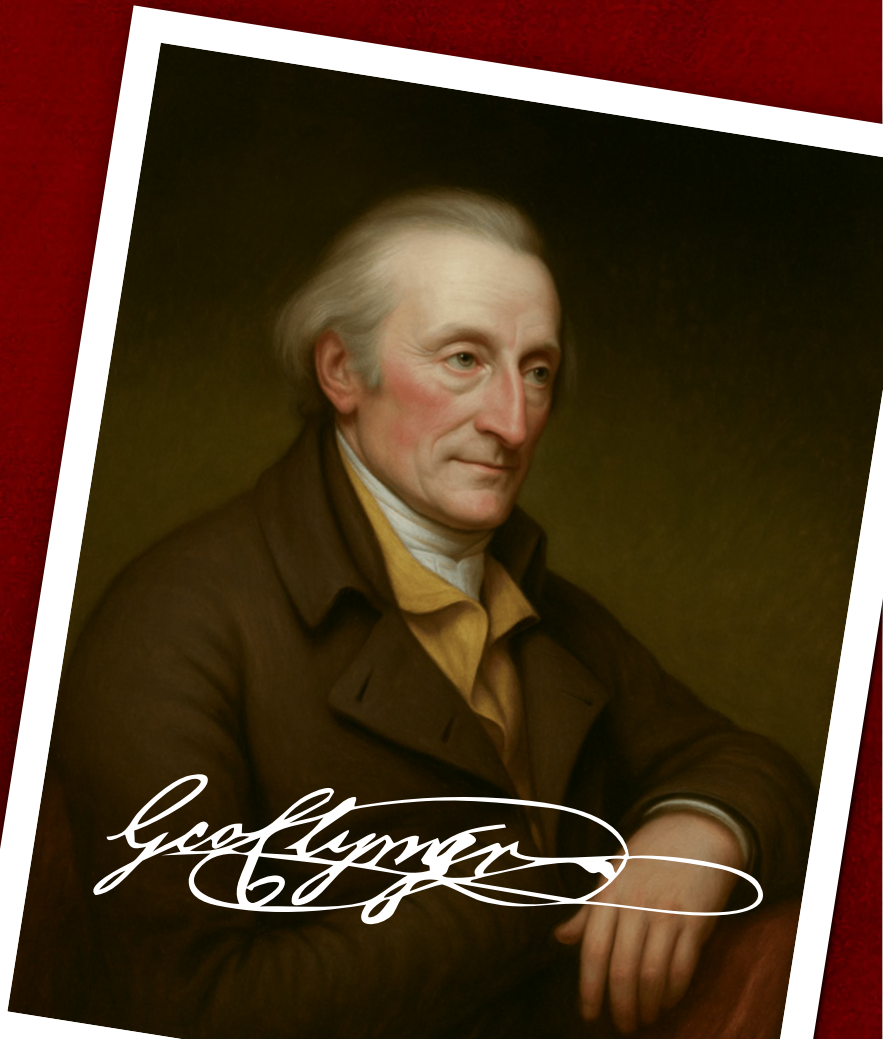
George Clymer

1739–1813

PENNSYLVANIA

George Clymer, a grandson of an original settler of the Pennsylvania colony, was a business man who served in the Pennsylvania legislature, and later as a Representative in the First Congress. Clymer abhorred Britain's restrictive economic policies, which threatened his business interests. His expertise in financial matters got him elected to the Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence and served as one of the first two Continental treasurers. There, Clymer personally underwrote the war effort.

Scan to watch a video about George Clymer.





James Smith

1719–1806

PENNSYLVANIA

James Smith fled Ireland with his family for freedom in Pennsylvania at age nine. He became a prominent man of the law and business who founded an iron manufacturing company and emerged as a leader in Pennsylvania politics. He helped form and organize the commonwealth's support for the cause of independence. He famously observed, "The happiness of the people is the end, and, if the term is allowable, we would call it the body of the constitution. Freedom is the spirit or soul."

Scan to watch a video about James Smith.

George Taylor

1716–1781

PENNSYLVANIA

George Taylor was commissioned captain in the Chester County militia in 1747. He served as a justice of the peace, a member of the provincial assembly, and a judge of the county court. His ironworks became vital during the Revolution, casting grapeshot, cannonballs, bar shot, and cannon for the Continental Army.

Taylor was selected as a representative to the Continental Congress to replace a member who had refused to sign the Declaration of Independence, appending his signature to the document on August 2, 1776.

Scan to watch a video about George Taylor.





George Ross

1730–1779

PENNSYLVANIA

George Ross was chosen early in his career to represent the crown of England as the King's prosecutor in Pennsylvania. 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.

Scan to watch a video about George Ross.

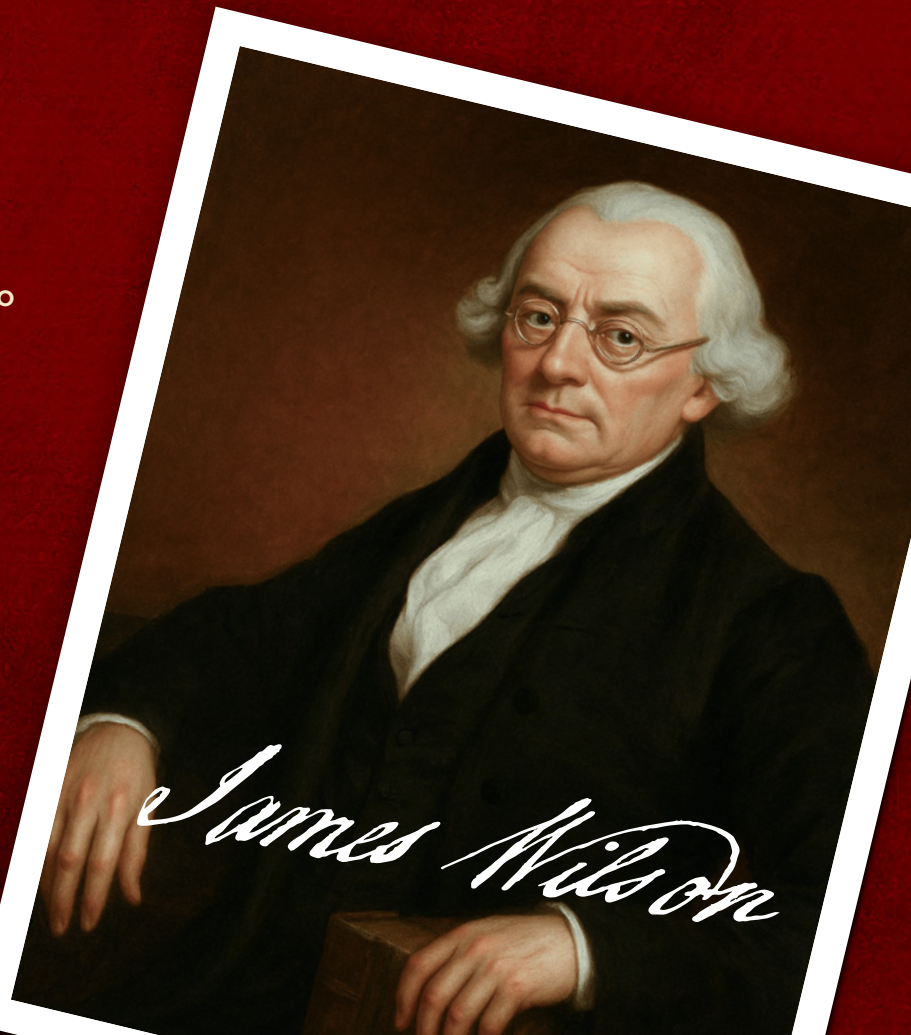
James Wilson

1742–1798

PENNSYLVANIA

James Wilson was the only individual to serve as a Supreme Court Justice and sign both the Declaration and the U.S. Constitution. Wilson wrote an essay in 1768 that became a precursor to the Declaration. "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." Wilson also helped craft elements of the Constitution, including popular sovereignty, a single executive, and the Electoral College.

Scan to watch a video about James Wilson.





Dr. Benjamin Rush

1746–1813

PENNSYLVANIA

Dr. Benjamin Rush was a physician, an abolitionist, an early adopter of the cause for independence, and one of the most influential Founding Fathers. He pioneered American psychiatric treatment and is often referred to as the "father of American psychiatry." Rush was also an early advocate for the education of women and for the abolition of slavery. He influenced Thomas Paine's Common Sense, a pivotal pro-independence pamphlet. Later Rush was appointed treasurer of the U.S. Mint by President John Adams.

Scan to watch a video about Dr. Benjamin Rush.

Robert Morris

1734–1806

PENNSYLVANIA

Robert Morris was indispensable to the cause of American independence. He was known as "Financier of the Revolution" for using his commercial and financial brilliance to almost single-handedly propel American war efforts to victory. In 1775, Morris entered public service, elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly and chosen as a Delegate to the Second Continental Congress. At the start of the Revolution, he was considered the wealthiest man in America. He worked closely with George Washington to secure supplies and often extended his own personal credit.

Scan to watch a video about Robert Morris.



SIGNERS BY STATE

New Jersey

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



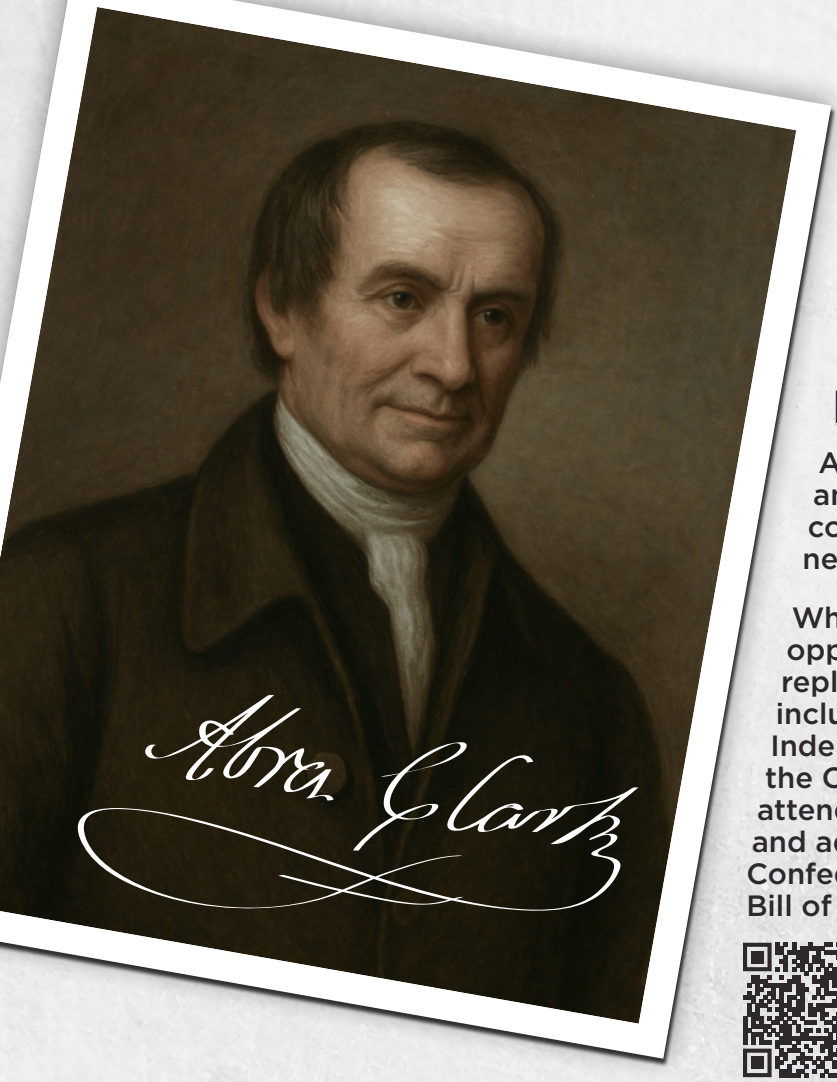
John Hart
1713–1779

Abraham Clark
1726–1794

Francis Hopkinson
1737–1791

Richard Stockton
1730–1781

John Witherspoon
1723–1794



Abraham Clark

1726–1794

NEW JERSEY

Abraham Clark was independently educated and became known as a "poor man's counselor," offering legal advice despite likely never being formally admitted to the bar.

When New Jersey's original delegates opposed independence, the state convention replaced them with six new delegates, including Clark. He signed the Declaration of Independence and maintained a presence in the Continental Congress. After the war, Clark attended the Annapolis Convention of 1786, and addressed the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. He lobbied for the inclusion of a Bill of Rights.

Scan to watch a video about Abraham Clark.

John Hart

1713–1779

NEW JERSEY

John Hart was selected as one of five delegates to represent New Jersey at the Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration of Independence. Shortly thereafter, he returned to New Jersey to serve as Speaker of the General Assembly. 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.

Scan to watch a video about John Hart.





Francis Hopkinson

1737–1791

NEW JERSEY

Francis Hopkinson was a man of many talents, from inventor to jurist to musician. He represented New Jersey in the Continental Congress and expressed his patriotism through music, satire, and poetry. His 1759 composition, "My Days Have Been So Wondrous Free," is considered the first secular song composed by an American. He also authored "Temple of Minerva" in 1781, recognized as the first American opera. Hopkinson is also credited by some historians with designing an early version of the American flag and became one of the young nation's best-known writers.

Scan to watch a video about Francis Hopkinson.

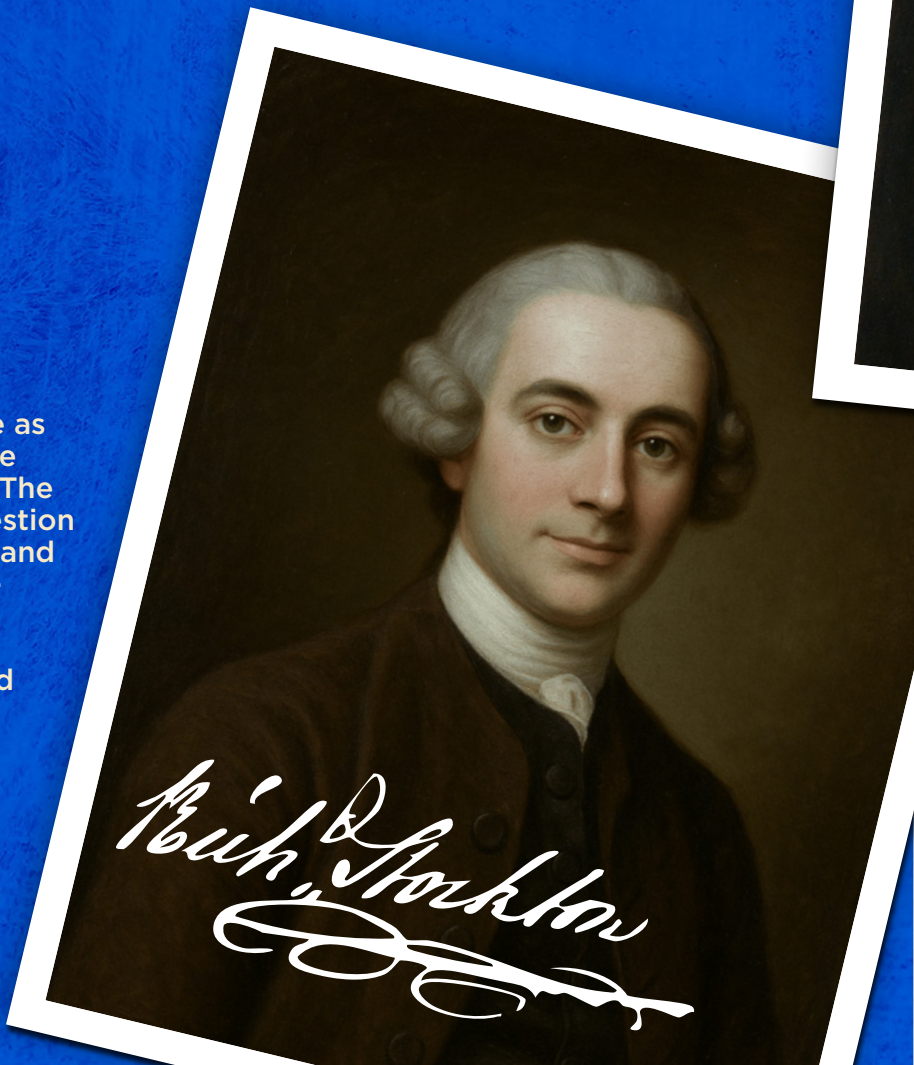
Richard Stockton

1730–1781

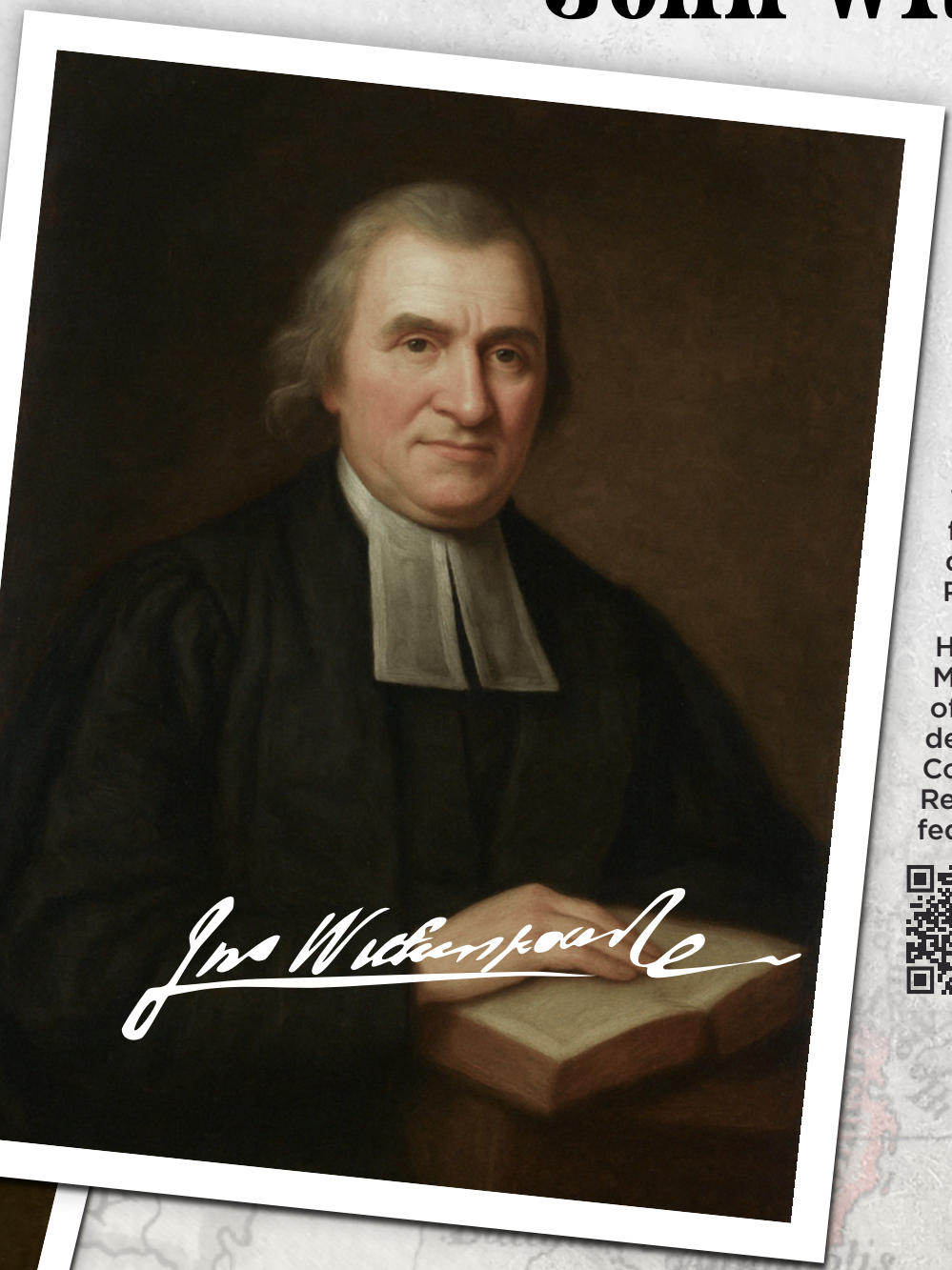
NEW JERSEY

Richard Stockton achieved prominence as a lawyer, and was later appointed to the New Jersey provincial Supreme Court. 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. Stockton was captured by British forces and imprisoned in New York. He was treated with inhumane severity and released months later in poor health.

Scan to watch a video about Richard Stockton.



John Witherspoon



1723–1794

NEW JERSEY

John Witherspoon was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration. Witherspoon and his family arrived in America after he accepted an offer to be the sixth president of the College of New Jersey—which became Princeton. Following the signing of the Declaration, the threat of British troops destroying the college led Witherspoon to close its doors for a time. But Witherspoon dedicated his life to rebuilding Princeton.

His students included James Madison, Aaron Burr, 12 members of the Continental Congress, five delegates to the Constitutional Convention, and various U.S. Representatives, Senators, and federal justices.

Scan to watch a video about John Witherspoon.

SIGNERS BY STATE

Delaware

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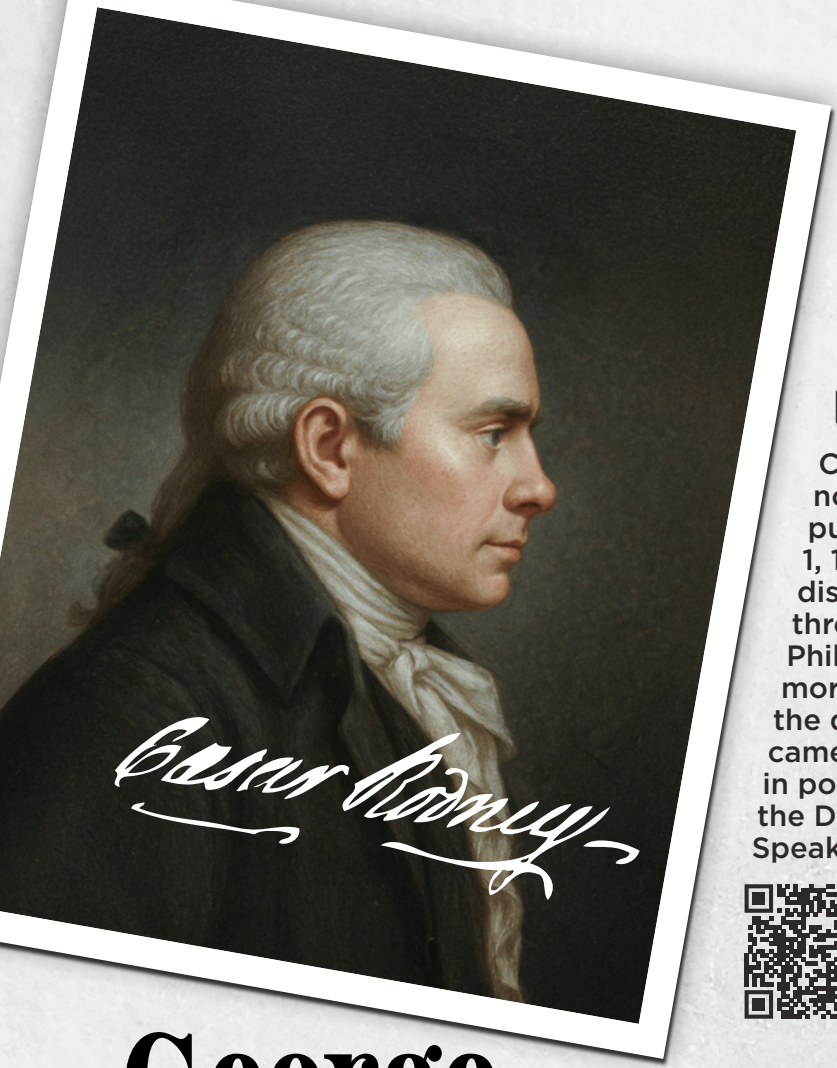


Caesar Rodney

1728–1784

DELAWARE

Caesar Rodney held many public offices, and no Delawarean since has matched his rigor of 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 in the dead of night to Philadelphia. He arrived in Philadelphia the next morning to break Delaware's deadlock, casting the decisive vote for independence. As the war came to a close, Rodney became too ill to remain in political life, but as a final gesture of respect, the Delaware Legislative Council elected him as Speaker.

Scan to watch a video about Caesar Rodney.

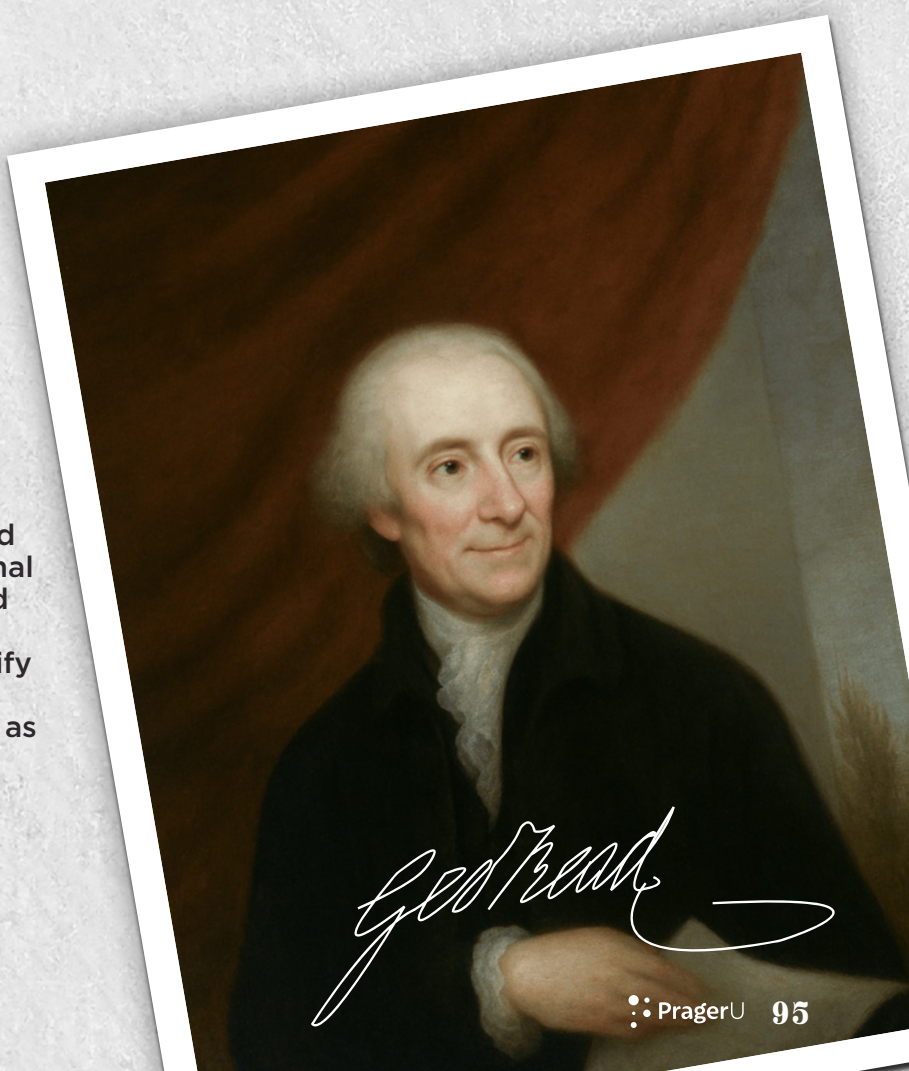
George Read

1733–1798

DELAWARE

George Read was a self-made lawyer and patriot who hoped to resolve colonial grievances without war and initially sought reconciliation with Britain. Read was also selected to draft Delaware's first constitution, earning the nickname "the father of Delaware." He led Delaware's delegation at the Constitutional Convention, where he strongly supported small state interests. There, 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.

Scan to watch a video about George Read.



Thomas McKean

1735–1817

DELAWARE



Thomas McKean held a number of public offices, including attorney general, justice of the peace, and speaker of the state house.

He also uniquely held office in both Delaware and Pennsylvania simultaneously and contributed to both states' constitutions.

McKean 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.

He later served three terms as governor of Pennsylvania, surviving political opposition and an attempted impeachment.

Scan to watch a video about Thomas McKean.

SIGNERS BY STATE

Maryland

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





Charles Carroll III

1737–1832

MARYLAND

Charles Carroll was the only Roman Catholic signer of the Declaration. Carroll was initially barred from public service due to his faith, but nonetheless amassed a fortune and was a major financier of the Revolution. When he signed the Declaration, one spectator reportedly remarked, "There go a few millions."

Later, he helped draft the Maryland Constitution, was instrumental in the state's ratification of the U.S. Constitution, and served as Maryland's first U.S. Senator. Carroll lived to 95—the longest-living and last surviving signer.

Scan to watch a video about Charles Carroll of Carrollton.

Samuel Chase

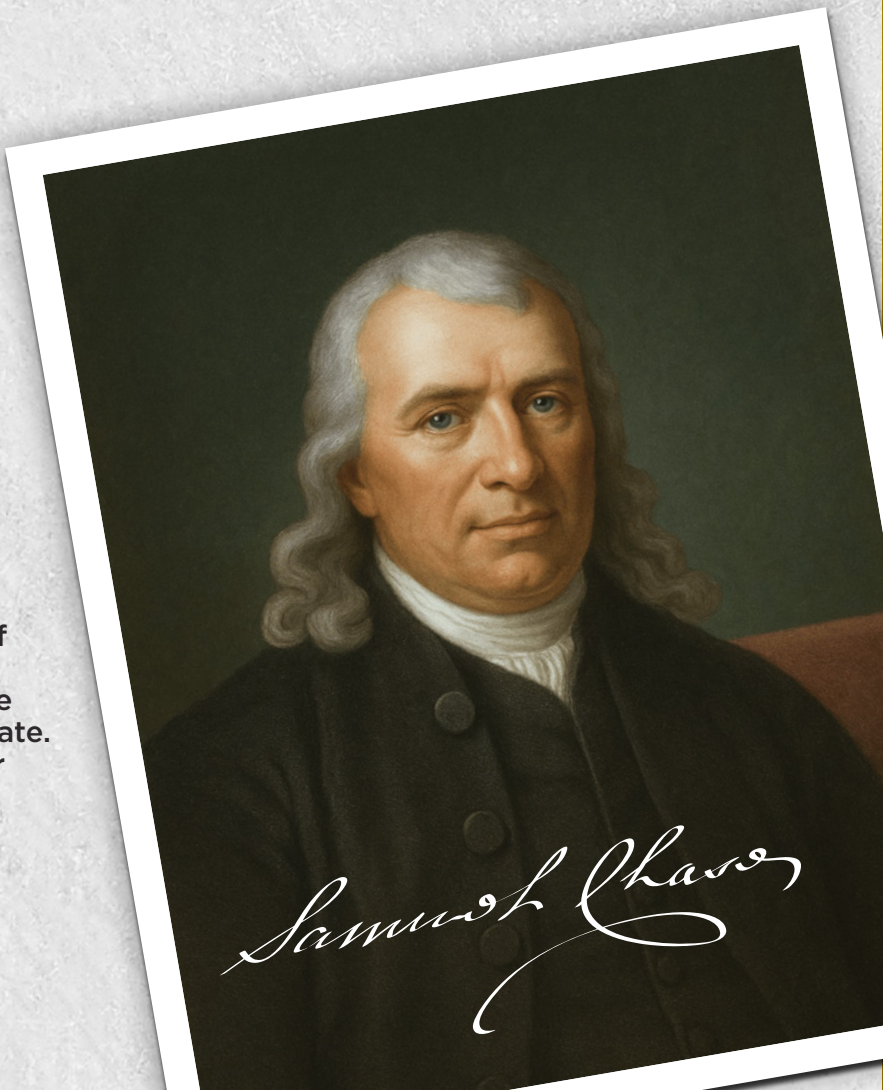
1741–1811

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.

After the war, President George Washington appointed Chase a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Chase's political views on the bench drew criticism, and he was impeached but acquitted by the Senate. The impeachment trial set precedents for judges to refrain from partisan politics.

Scan to watch a video about Samuel Chase.





William Paca

1740–1799

MARYLAND

William Paca was a respected lawyer, jurist, and public servant known for his quiet, razor-sharp logic and strategy. As British oppression against the colonies grew, he helped form the "Sons of Liberty," and 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. After the war, 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.

Scan to watch a video about William Paca.

Thomas Stone

1743–1787

MARYLAND

Thomas Stone was initially cautious on the question of independence, even as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress.

But Stone ultimately signed his name for the cause and then served as a Maryland state senator. He was also a member of the committee that framed the Articles of Confederation in 1777.

Scan to watch a video about Thomas Stone.



SIGNERS BY STATE

Virginia

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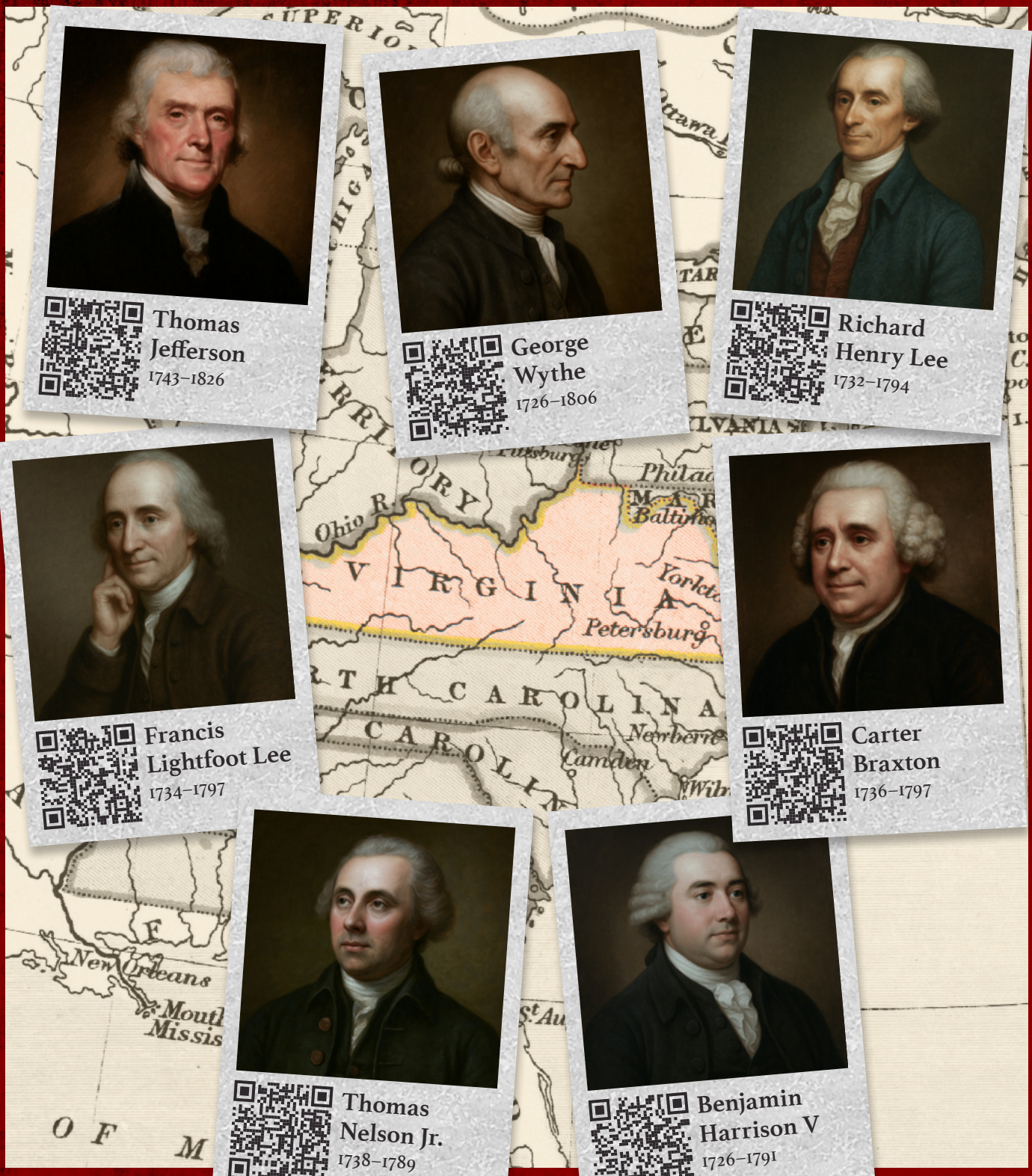




Thomas Jefferson

1743–1826

VIRGINIA

Thomas Jefferson was the primary drafter of the Declaration of Independence and the third president of the United States. At 26, Jefferson entered the Virginia House of Burgesses, and at the Second Continental Congress, he agreed to draft the Declaration when John Adams insisted.

As president, Jefferson orchestrated the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the nation's size.

After two terms, he retired to Monticello, and died on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Scan to watch a video about Thomas Jefferson.

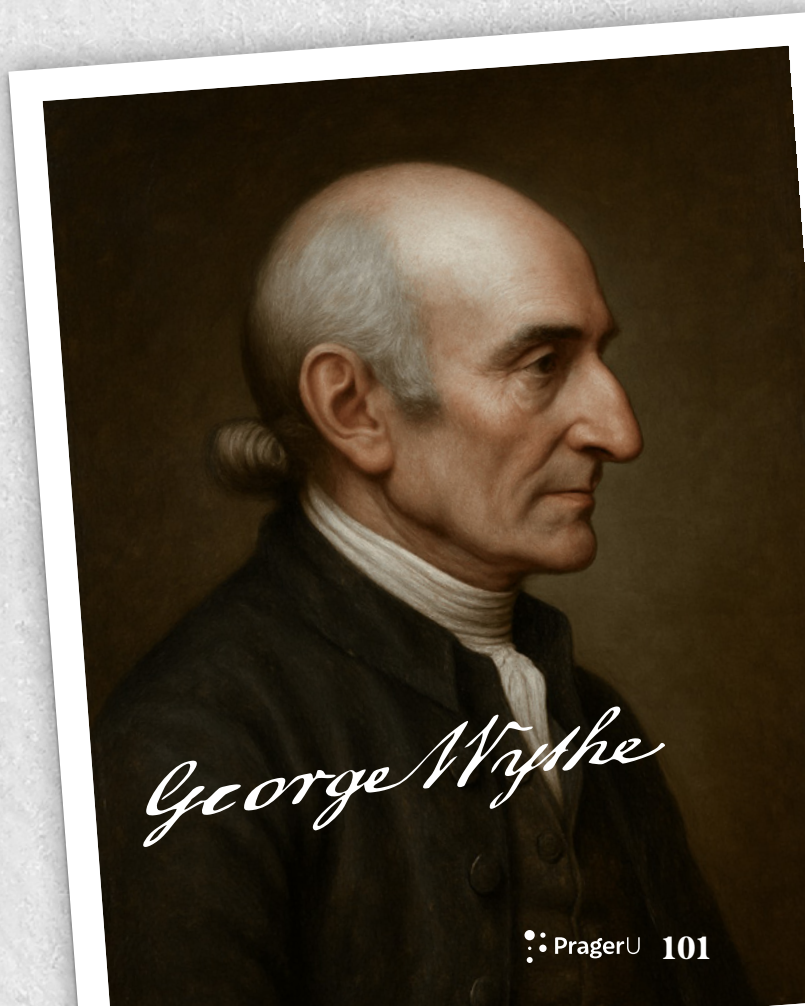
George Wythe

1726–1806

VIRGINIA

George Wythe was a lawyer, judge, and the first law professor at any American institution. His legal talent earned him a strong reputation, and in 1754, he became acting Attorney General of Virginia—the youngest to hold the position. Wythe later served in the House of Burgesses mentoring students like Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and John Marshall throughout his career. As tensions rose with Britain, Wythe became an advocate for independence and earned a seat in the Second Continental Congress. He helped draft the Virginia state constitution and design the state seal.

Scan to watch a video about George Wythe.





Richard Henry Lee

1732–1794

VIRGINIA

Richard Henry Lee 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.

As a delegate to the Continental Congress, he 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.

Scan to watch a video about Richard Henry Lee.

Francis Lightfoot Lee

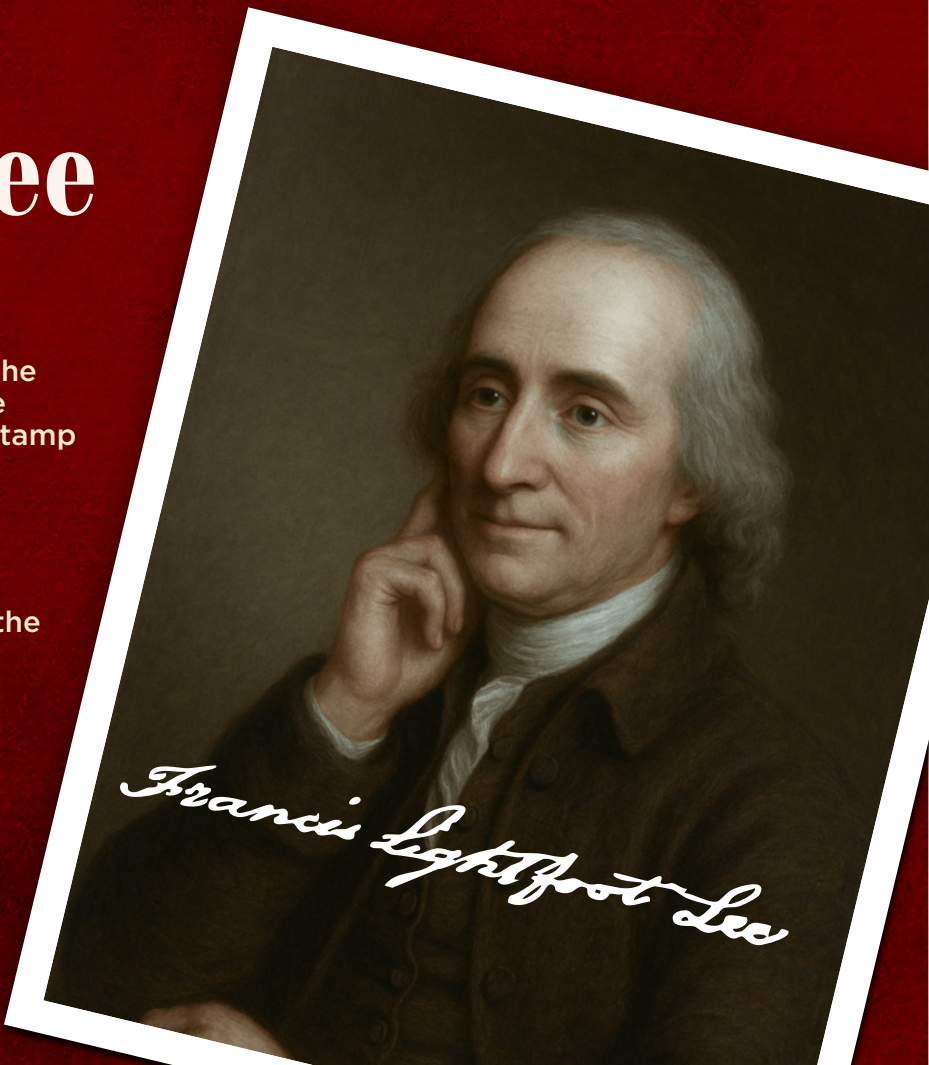
1734–1797

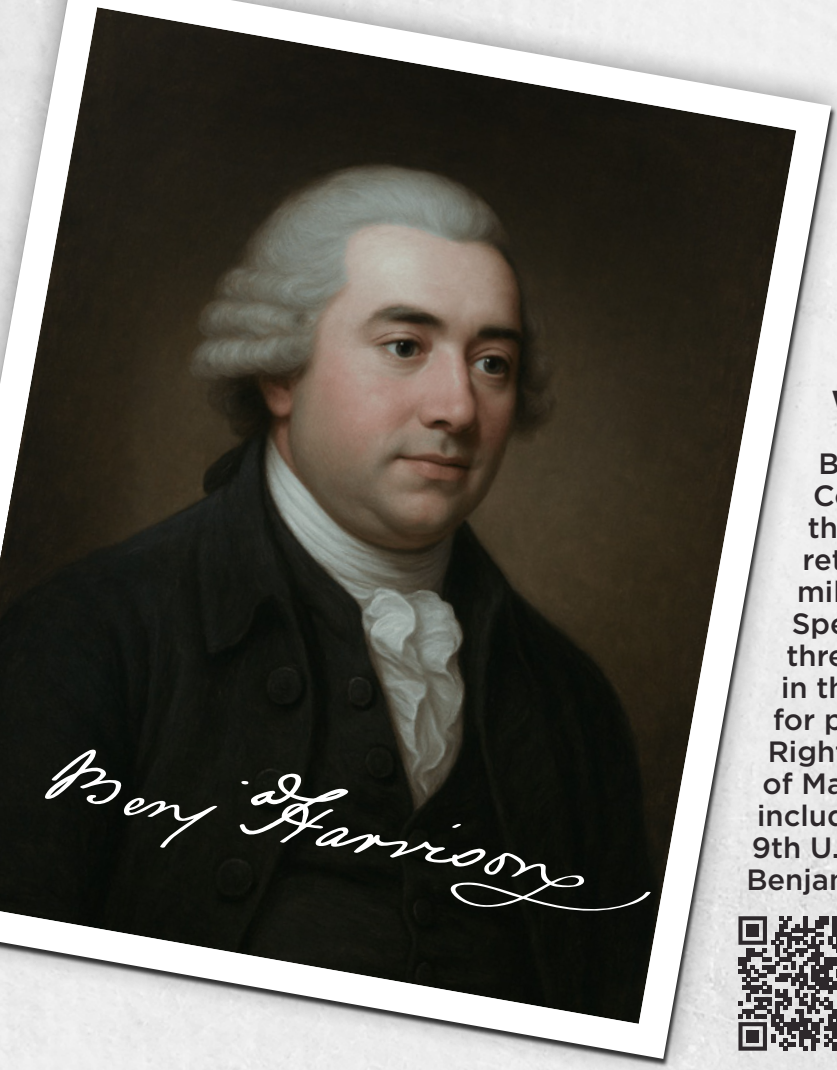
VIRGINIA

Francis Lightfoot Lee was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he opposed British policies such as the Stamp Act and spoke out for colonial rights.

He served in the First and Second Continental Congresses 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.

Scan to watch our a about Francis Lightfoot Lee.





Benjamin Harrison V

1726–1791

VIRGINIA

Benjamin Harrison V was elected to the Continental Congress, and in 1776, he signed the Declaration of Independence. He soon returned to Virginia politics and served as a militia lieutenant there. Harrison was elected Speaker of the Virginia House, and later served three terms as Governor. In 1788, he took part in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, advocating for protections that would later form the Bill of Rights. Harrison married Elizabeth Bassett, niece of Martha Washington. They had eight children, including William Henry Harrison, who became the 9th U.S. president in 1841, and his great-grandson Benjamin Harrison became the 23rd president.

Scan to watch a video about Benjamin Harrison.

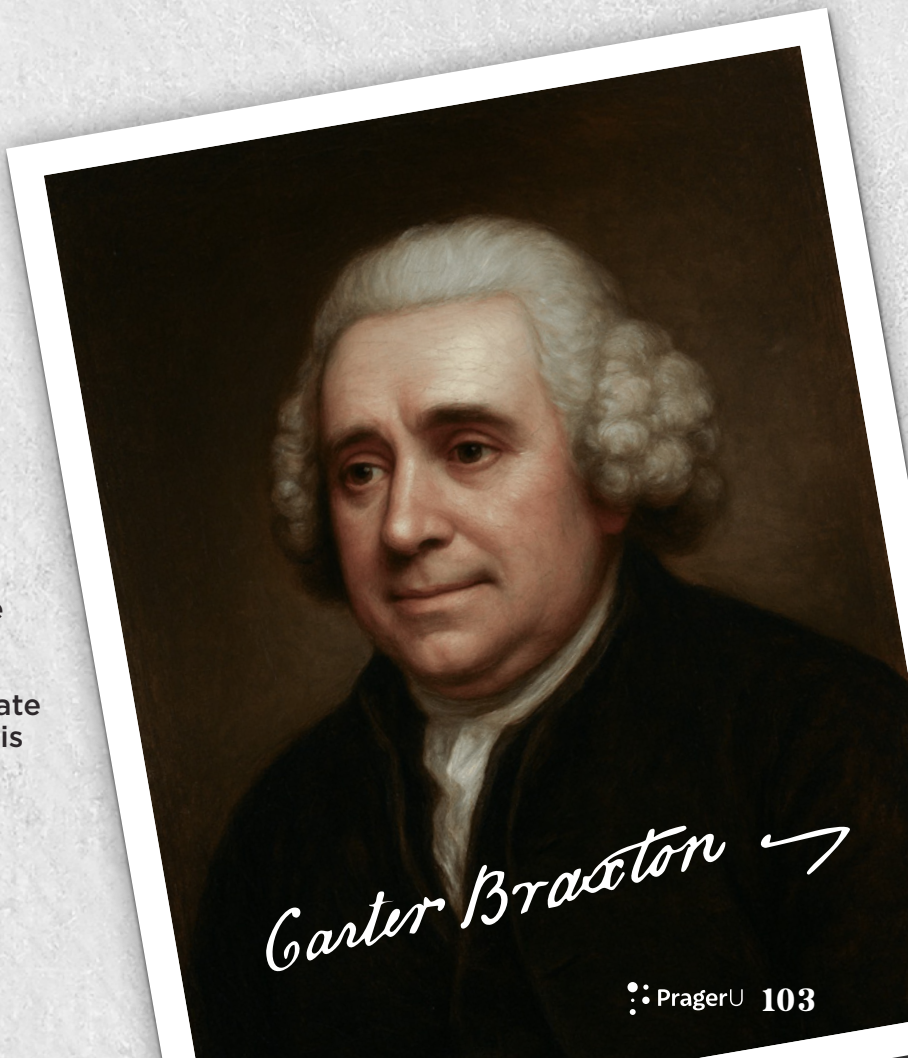
Carter Braxton

1736–1797

VIRGINIA

Carter Braxton was a wealthy landowner, businessman, and financier of the American Revolution. He joined the Virginia House of Burgesses and in 1776 was appointed as a delegate to the Continental Congress. Though initially reluctant, Braxton invested heavily in the Patriot cause, funding the Continental Navy and military efforts. After the war, Braxton continued to serve in Virginia state government, having sacrificed much of his fortune in support of American freedom.

Scan to watch a video about Carter Braxton.



Thomas Nelson Jr.



1738–1789

VIRGINIA

Thomas Nelson Jr. entered public service when he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. When patriots issued a resolution in 1761 excoriating the British Parliament, Nelson sided with colonists against the Royal Governor, who dissolved the assembly. This event set in motion the cause for independence.

Nelson was later elected to replace Thomas Jefferson as Governor. As Brigadier General, he besieged the British in his hometown. According to tradition, Nelson told Washington to aim fire on his home when he heard it was occupied by the British.

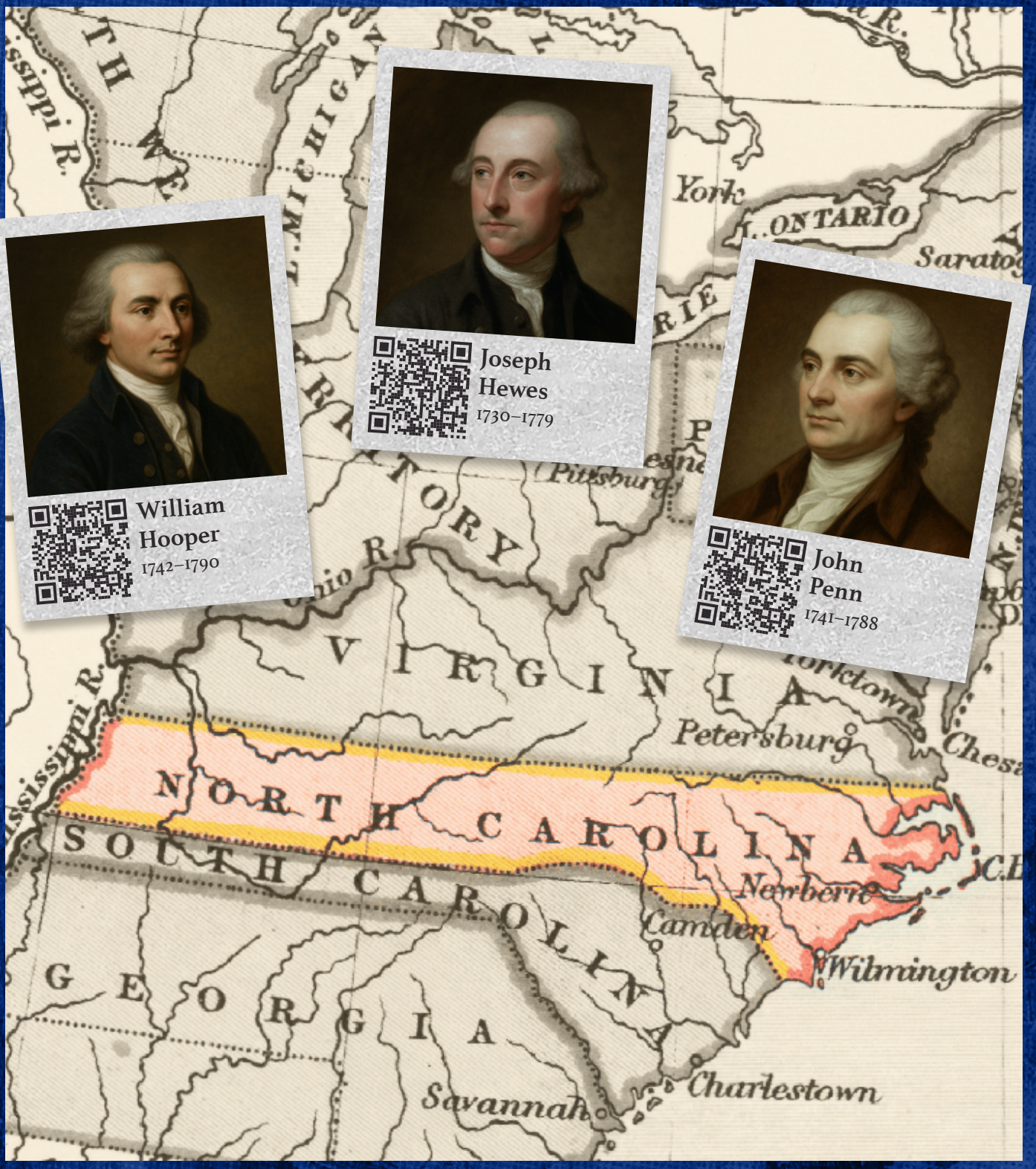
Nelson was among the signers to make good on a pledge to give his fortune to the cause of independence. He died poor in 1789.

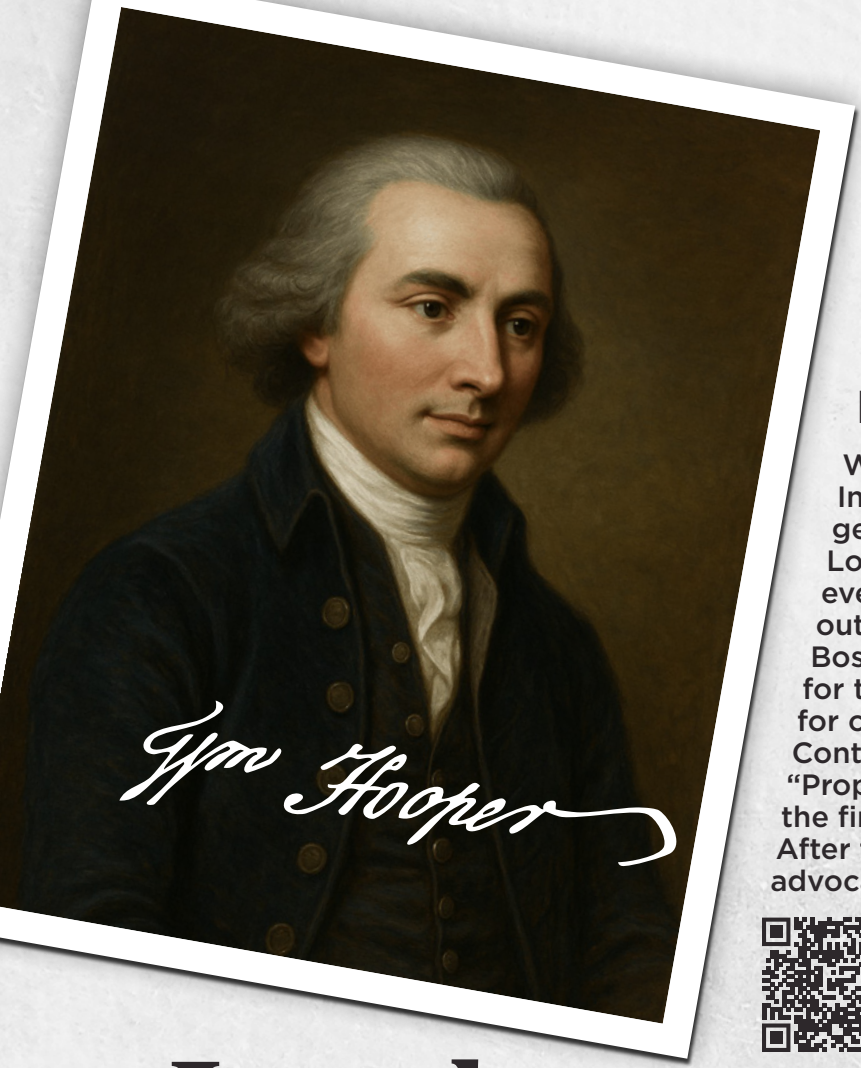
Scan to watch a video about Thomas Nelson Jr.

SIGNERS BY STATE

North Carolina

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





William Hooper

1742–1790

NORTH CAROLINA

William Hooper was a reluctant revolutionary. In 1770, he was appointed deputy attorney general of North Carolina and defended Loyalist policies and British authority. 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. He began advocating for colonial rights and 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. After the war, Hooper resumed his law practice and advocated for fair treatment of British Loyalists.

Scan to watch a video about William Hooper.

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.

In 1775, North Carolina elected Hewes to the Second Continental Congress, where he sat on the committee to prepare the Articles of Confederation.

Scan to watch a video about Joseph Hewes.



John Penn

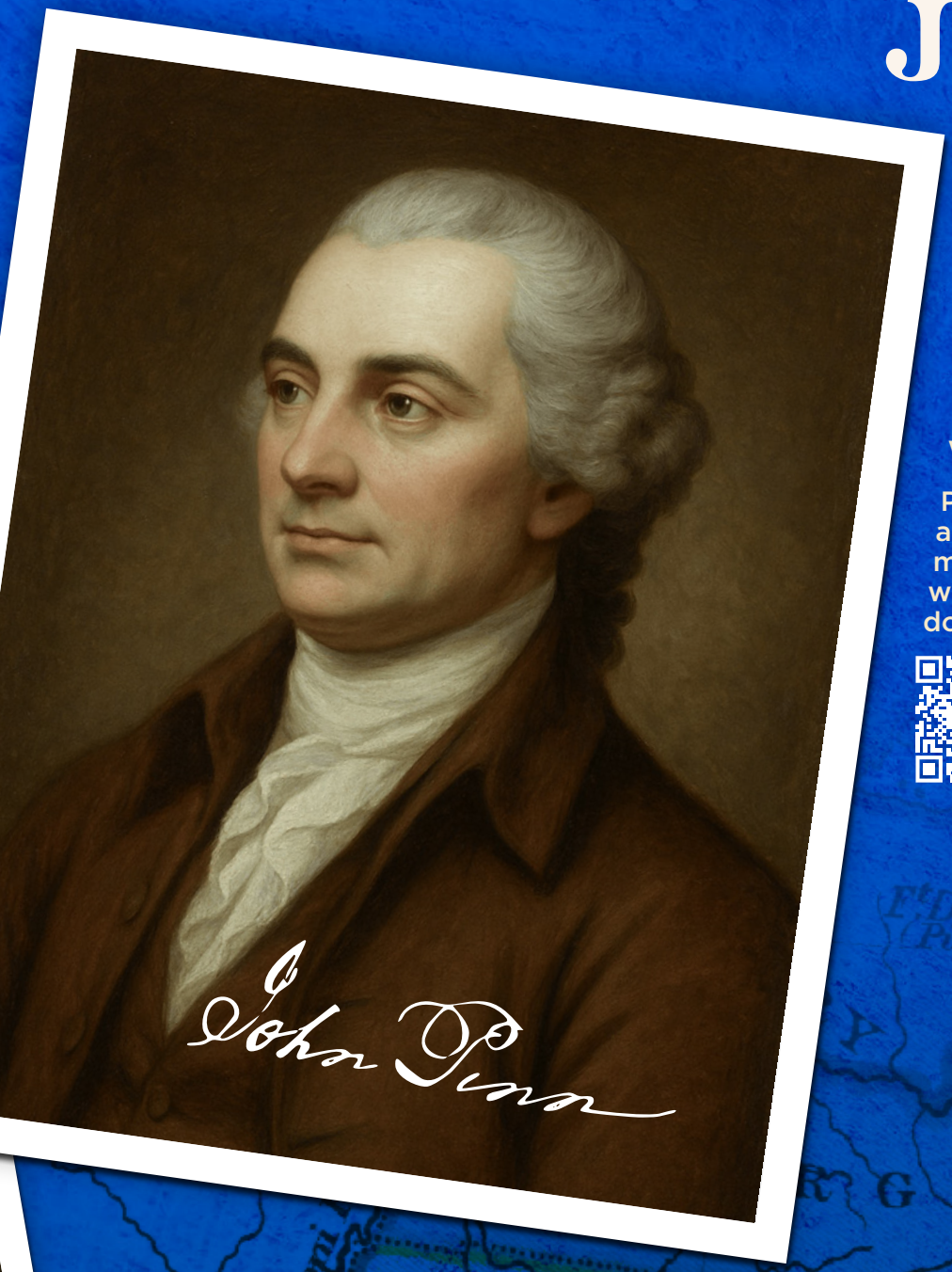
1741–1788

NORTH CAROLINA

John Penn's fiery opposition to the Stamp Act ignited his political ascent. Despite little education, 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."

Penn signed both the Declaration and the Articles of Confederation, making him one of 16 signers whose names appear on both documents.

Scan to watch a video about John Penn.

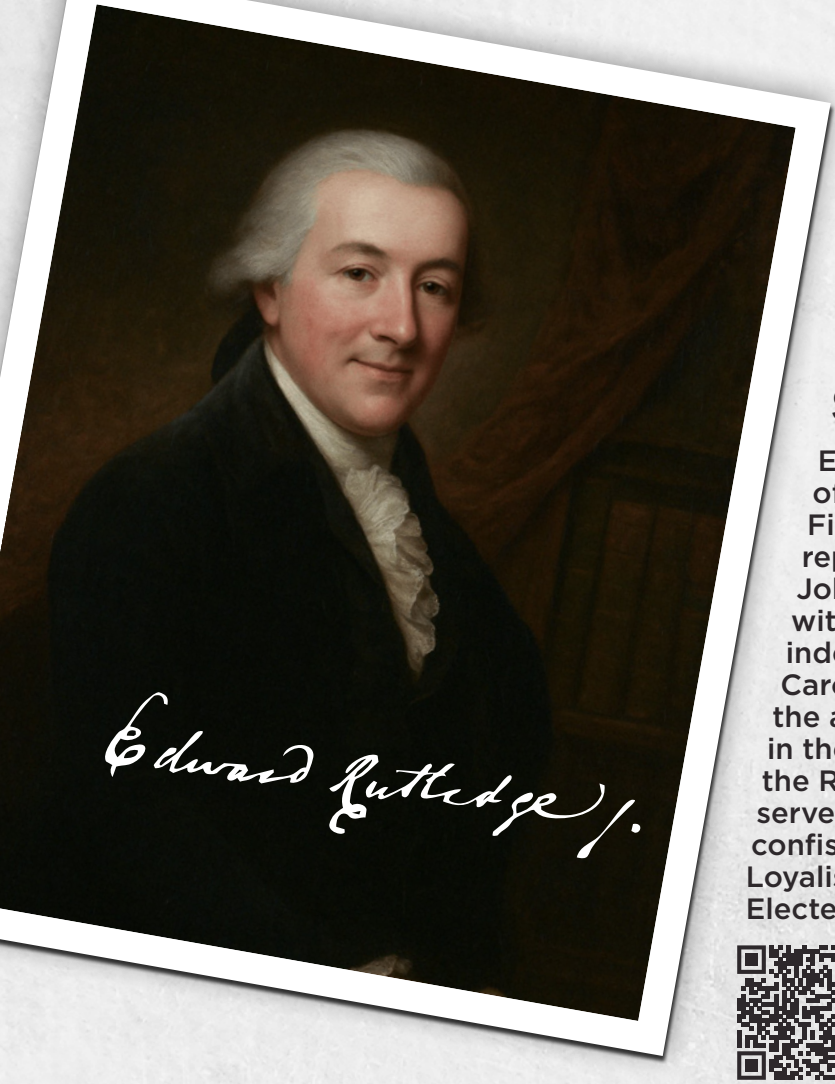


SIGNERS BY STATE

South Carolina

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





Edward Rutledge

1749–1800

SOUTH CAROLINA

Edward Rutledge was the youngest signer of the Declaration. He was elected to the First Continental Congress at the age of 24 to represent South Carolina alongside his brother John. Initially, Rutledge favored reconciliation with Britain. However, he ultimately supported independence, reportedly persuading the South Carolina delegation to unanimously vote in the affirmative. Rutledge served as a captain in the Charleston Artillery Battalion during the Revolutionary War. After the war, Rutledge served in the state legislature, advocated for the confiscation of property belonging to English Loyalists, and voted to ratify the U.S. Constitution. Elected governor in 1798, Rutledge died in office.

Scan to watch a video about Edward Rutledge.

Thomas Heyward Jr.

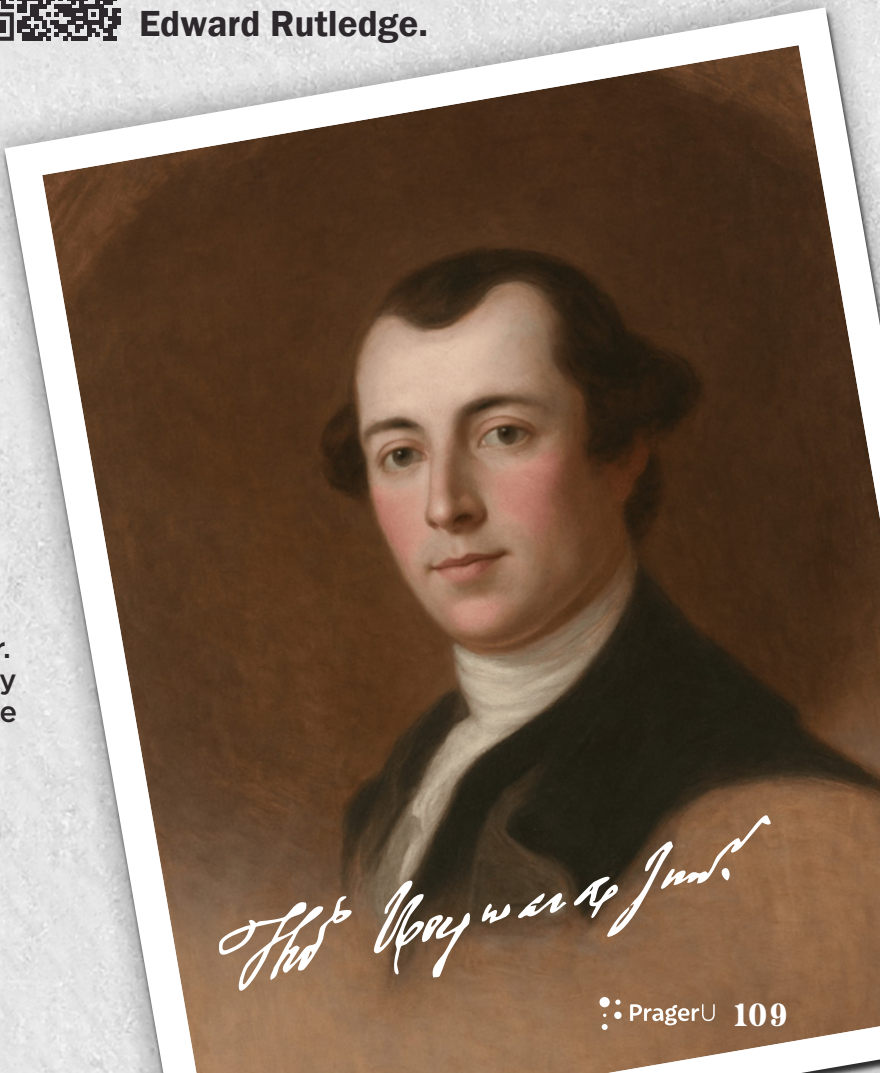
1746–1809

SOUTH CAROLINA

Thomas Heyward Jr. 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, was wounded, later captured by British forces, and held as a prisoner of war. During his imprisonment, he wrote a parody of "God Save the King" titled "God Save the Thirteen States."

Scan to watch a video about Thomas Heyward Jr.





Thomas Lynch Jr.

1749–1779

SOUTH CAROLINA

Thomas Lynch Jr. was the second-youngest signer of the Declaration of Independence and did not live to see the end of the Revolution. Following his father into revolutionary politics, he became a vocal advocate for independence and served in South Carolina's first and second provincial congresses, its first state legislature, and helped draft the state's first constitution. Lynch's father suffered a stroke while serving in the Continental Congress so he traveled 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 in 1776 and reportedly left space on the parchment for his father, who died on his way home.

Scan to watch a video about Thomas Lynch Jr.

Arthur Middleton

1742–1787

SOUTH CAROLINA

Arthur Middleton was one of only three signers of the Declaration of Independence to become a prisoner of war. Middleton was a strong critic of British authority who advocated for harsh measures against Loyalists and helped organize military defense. He contributed to drafting South Carolina's constitution and co-designed the state's official seal. Middleton replaced his ill father in the Continental Congress, where he signed the Declaration and supported additional military aid to the South. Following the war, he served in the state legislature and became a trustee of the College of Charleston.

Scan to watch a video about Arthur Middleton.



SIGNERS BY STATE

Georgia

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



Button Gwinnett
1735–1777

Lyman Hall
1724–1790

George Walton
1741–1804



Button Gwinnett

1735–1777

GEORGIA

Button Gwinnett purchased St. Catherine's Island off the coast of Georgia, where he became a planter. Gwinnett also became active in local politics, and was elected commander of Georgia's Continental Battalion.

After signing the Declaration, Gwinnett returned to Georgia, where he was elected Speaker of the Colonial Assembly and helped draft the state's first constitution.

Scan to watch a video about Button Gwinnett.

Lyman Hall

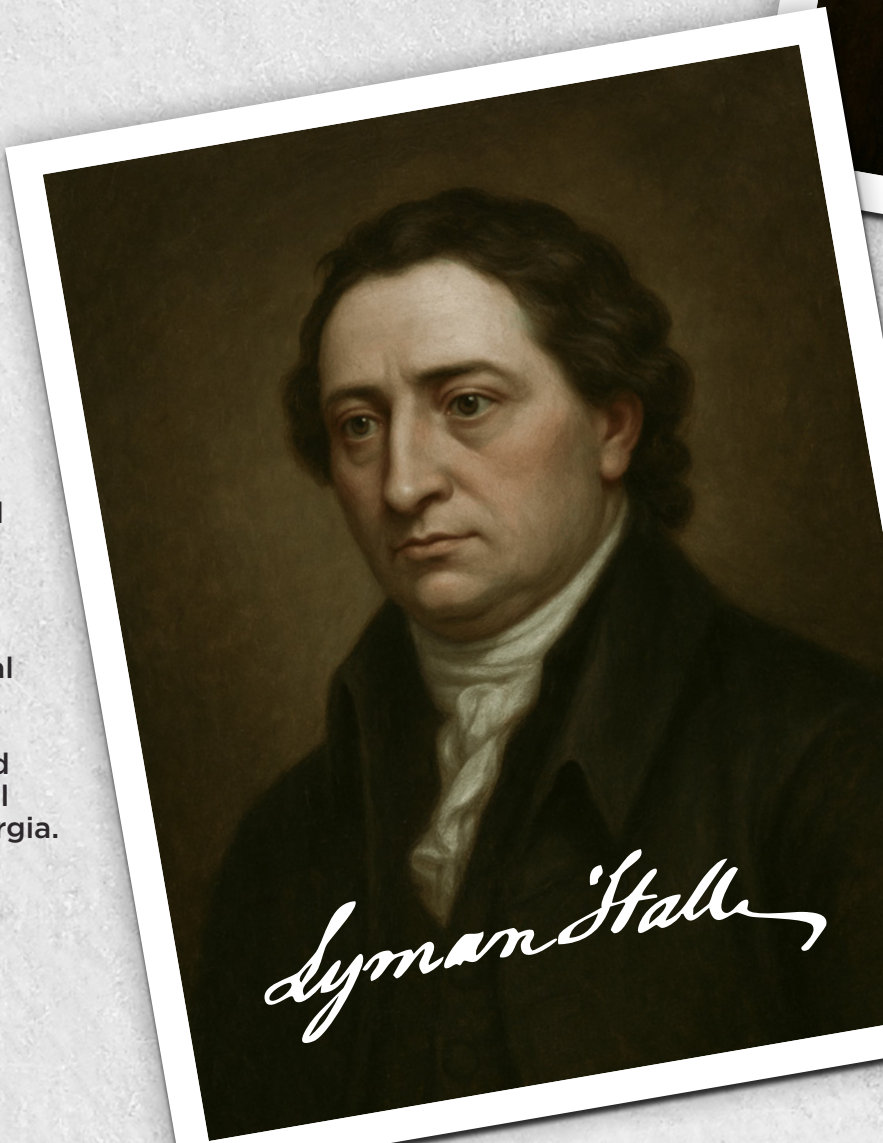
1724–1790

GEORGIA

Lyman Hall was an ordained Congregational minister, but soon pursued a career in medicine. Hall moved to Georgia and expressed his discontent with the King. He soon became a spokesman for Puritan discontent.

He was elected to the Second Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence—one of four practicing physicians to do so. Hall was later elected Governor of Georgia, and played a crucial role in establishing the University of Georgia.

Scan to watch a video about Lyman Hall.





George Walton

1741–1804

GEORGIA

George Walton helped organize Georgia's revolutionary movement, assembling in Savannah to denounce the Intolerable Acts. Walton was appointed a delegate to the Continental Congress in 1776.

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 twice, during which he helped adopt a new state constitution.

Scan to watch a 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:

To explore the extended biographies of each woman, scan the QR codes to watch video profiles and view White House exhibit photos.

Abigail Adams..... p. 115

Betsy Ross..... p. 115

Dolley Madison..... p. 116

Phillis Wheatley..... p. 116

Martha Washington..... p. 117

Mercy Otis Warren..... p. 117



Abigail Adams

1744–1818

MASSACHUSETTS

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."

Scan to watch a video about Abigail Adams.

Betsy Ross

1752–1836

PENNSYLVANIA

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.

Scan to watch a video about Betsy Ross.





Dolley Madison

1768–1849

NORTH CAROLINA

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.

Scan to watch a video about Dolley Madison.

Phillis Wheatley

1753–1784

MASSACHUSETTS

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.

Scan to watch a video about Phillis Wheatley.





Martha Washington

1731–1802

VIRGINIA

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.

Scan to watch a video about Martha Washington.

Mercy Otis Warren

1728–1814

MASSACHUSETTS

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.

Scan to watch a video about Mercy Otis Warren.



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About This Book

This book serves as a companion to "The Road to Liberty" exhibit at the Founders Museum at the White House, developed in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education. It also complements the Freedom Truck Mobile Museums, created alongside Freedom 250 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

Find out more at www.PragerU.com/America250

" My celebration of America is a celebration of American Values... Libterty, 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
- Fun, educational family activities
- Key Revolutionary War events and turning points
- Founding Father profiles

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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