

The FATE of "the Signers of The Declaration of Independence"

Fifty-six men signed the document. They came from all walks of life. Twenty-three were lawyers, twelve were merchants, twelve were men of the soil, four were physicians, two were manufactures, one was a politician, one a printer, and another a minister.

Those signers pledged their lives, and some paid that price for this nation's birth and our birthright.

At least nine of them died as a result of the war or its hardships on them. The first of the signers to die was John Morton of Pennsylvania. He was at first sympathetic to the British, but finally changed his mind and cast his vote for independence. By doing so, his friends, relatives, and neighbors turned against him. Those who knew him best said this ostracism hastened his death, for he lived only eight months after the signing. His last words were, "tell them that they will live to see the hour when they shall acknowledge it to have been the most glorious service that I ever rendered to my country."

Another to pay with his life was Caesar Rodney. Suffering facial cancer, he left his sickbed at midnight and rode all night by horseback through a severe storm. He arrived just in time to cast the deciding vote for his delegation in favor of independence. His doctors told him he needed treatment obtainable only in Europe. He refused to go in this time of his country's crisis. The decision cost him his life.

When the British came to Trenton, they settled near the home of John Hart, one of the five signers from New Jersey. He had a large farm and several grist mills. While his wife was on her deathbed, Hessian soldiers descended on Hart's property. They destroyed his mills, ravaged his property, and scattered his thirteen children. Hart became a hunted fugitive. When he finally returned to his land, he was broken in health, his farmland was scourged, his wife had died, and his children were all scattered. He died three years after signing the declaration.

Yes, the signers also pledged their fortunes, and at least fifteen saw the realization of that pledge. Twelve had their homes ransacked or ruined. Six literally gave their fortunes to further the cause. When the four New York delegates signed the declaration, they signed away their property. William Floyd was exiled from his home for seven years and was practically ruined financially. Francis Lewis had his home plundered and burned, and his wife was carried away prisoner. She suffered great brutality and never regained her health; she died within two years. He never regained his fortune. Lewis Morris had his property destroyed and, like Floyd, was denied his home for seven years. Phillip Livingston never saw his home again, for his estate became a British naval hospital. He sold all of his remaining property to finance the revolution. He died before the war was over.

Another signer, merchant Robert Morris, lost 150 ships, which were sunk during the war. Three of the four signers from South Carolina: Thomas Heyward, Arthur Middleton, and Edward Rutledge were taken prisoner by the British and imprisoned for ten months.

Thomas Nelson, Jr., of Virginia died in poverty at age fifty-one. He gave his fortune to help finance the war and never regained either it or his health. Before Patrick Henry gave his great speech, he was preceded by Nelson who said, "I am a merchant of Yorktown, but I am a Virginian first. Let my trade perish. I call God to witness that if any British troops are landed in the County of Yorks, of which I am a Lieutenant, I will wait no order, but will summon the militia and drive the invaders into the sea."

When Patrick Henry declared his immortal words, "give me liberty or give me death," he was not speaking idly. When those signers affixed their signatures to that sacred document, they were, in a real sense, choosing liberty or death, for if the revolution failed, if their fight had come to naught, they would be hanged as traitors.

Ezra Taft Benson - This Nation Shall Endure