

# *Signers of the Declaration of Independence*



Throughout 1775 and early 1776, most Americans—including delegates of the Continental Congress—saw themselves as simply being in active and well-justified rebellion against their rightful king. They hoped that the king would install a new government and institute new policies, but still remain their sovereign. Three-quarters of the colonists were descended from English families; their Bible, their prayer books, and their schoolbooks were written in English; and the history they learned and the heroes, saints, and martyrs they revered were English.

So it was an especially inspiring yet solemn occasion when, upon the document's very last line, these patriots pledged by their signatures the following:

‘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.’

## Who Were the Signers?

Name	Age at Declaration	Colony	Profession
John Adams	40	Massachusetts	lawyer
Samuel Adams	53	Massachusetts	businessman
Josiah Bartlett	46	New Hampshire	physician
Carter Braxton	39	Virginia	planter
Charles Carroll	38	Maryland	lawyer-planter
Samuel Chase	35	Maryland	lawyer
Abraham Clark	50	New Jersey	politician
George Clymer	37	Pennsylvania	banker
William Ellery	48	Rhode Island	lawyer
William Floyd	41	New York	farmer
Benjamin Franklin	70	Pennsylvania	publisher
Elbridge Gerry	31	Massachusetts	merchant
Button Gwinnett	41	Georgia	merchant
Lyman Hall	52	Georgia	physician
John Hancock	39	Massachusetts	merchant
Benjamin Harrison	50	Virginia	planter
John Hart	65	New Jersey	farmer
Joseph Hewes	46	North Carolina	merchant
Thomas Heyward, Jr.	29	South Carolina	lawyer
William Hooper	34	North Carolina	lawyer
Stephin Hopkins	69	Rhode Island	merchant
Francis Hopkinson	38	New Jersey	lawyer
Samuel Huntington	45	Connecticut	lawyer
Thomas Jefferson	33	Virginia	lawyer-planter
Francis Lightfoot Lee	41	Virginia	planter
Richard Henry Lee	44	Virginia	planter
Francis Lewis	63	New York	merchant
Philip Livingston	60	New York	merchant
Thomas Lynch, Jr.	26	South Carolina	lawyer-planter

Name	Age at Declaration	Colony	Profession
Thomas McKean	42	Delaware	lawyer
Arthur Middleton	34	South Carolina	lawyer-planter
Lewis Morris	50	New York	landowner
Robert Morris	42	Pennsylvania	financier
John Morton	52	Pennsylvania	farmer
Thomas Nelson	37	Virginia	planter-merchant
William Paca	35	Maryland	lawyer
Robert Treat Paine	45	Massachusetts	lawyer
John Penn	36	North Carolina	lawyer
George Read	42	Delaware	lawyer
Caesar Rodney	47	Delaware	planter
George Ross	46	Pennsylvania	lawyer
Benjamin Rush	30	Pennsylvania	physician
Edward Rutledge	26	South Carolina	lawyer-planter
Roger Sherman	55	Connecticut	lawyer-merchant
James Smith	57	Pennsylvania	lawyer
Richard Stockton	45	New Jersey	lawyer
Thomas Stone	33	Maryland	lawyer
George Taylor	60	Pennsylvania	iron-maker
Matthew Thornton	62	New Hampshire	physician
George Walton	35	Georgia	lawyer
William Whipple	46	New Hampshire	merchant
William Williams	45	Connecticut	merchant
James Wilson	33	Pennsylvania	lawyer
John Witherspoon	53	New Jersey	clergyman
Oliver Wolcott	49	Connecticut	politician-soldier
George Wythe	50	Virginia	lawyer

## *Facts About the Signers of the Declaration of Independence*

- All 56 of those who signed the Declaration eventually suffered to some extent from physical hardships, loss of loved ones, financial failure, and damage to (and, in some instances, complete destruction of) their families.
- All but eight of the signers were native-born.
- Of the foreign-born, two were from England, one from Wales, two from Scotland, and three from Ireland.
- Two were bachelors.
- About one-third of the signers were wiped out financially.
- Robert Morris, an extremely wealthy patriot known as ‘Financier of the Revolution,’ lost his fortune in land speculation after the Revolutionary War. With debts of three million dollars, he was sent to debtors’ prison in 1798. Although he was penniless, the prison charged him rent for what Morris called his ‘hotel with the grated door.’ His cell included a writing desk, bedstead, settee, chairs, and mirrors, and his visitors were as varied and distinguished as Alexander Hamilton and George Washington. Five years after completing his 3½-year sentence, Morris died in poverty and obscurity.
- Thomas McKean of Pennsylvania once wrote the following to John Adams:

‘I have had my full share of the anxieties, cares, and troubles of the present war. For some time, I was obliged to act as president of the Delaware state and as chief justice of this. General Howe had just landed at the head of the Elk river when I undertook to discharge these two important trusts. The consequence was to be hunted like a fox by the enemy, and envied by those who ought to have been my friends.

‘I was compelled to remove my family five times in a few months and at last, find them in a little log house on the banks of the Susquehanna, more than a hundred miles from this place; but safety was not to be found there, for they were soon obliged to remove again, on account of the incursions of the Indians.’

- The signers lived to an average age of 66 years.
- Three lived into their nineties!