

THE PRICE THEY PAID FOR OUR FREEDOM

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

- Five signers were captured by the British as traitors and tortured to death.
- Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.
- Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army and another had two sons captured.
- Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or the hardships of the Revolutionary War.

They signed and pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they?

- Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists.
- Eleven were merchants; nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well educated.

But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

- Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British navy. He sold his home and his properties to pay his debts, and died in rags.
- Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him and poverty was his reward.
- Vandals or soldiers, or both, looted the properties of Ellery, Clymer, Hall, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.
- At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr. noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. The owner quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson later died bankrupt.
- Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.
- John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for

their lives. His fields and his grist mill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart.

- Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Such are the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. They were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more.

Standing tall, straight, and unwavering, they pledged:

"For the support of this declaration, with the firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

Is it no wonder then that Samuel Adams said:

"If you love wealth more than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chain be set lightly upon you and may posterity forget ye were our countrymen."

They were heroes