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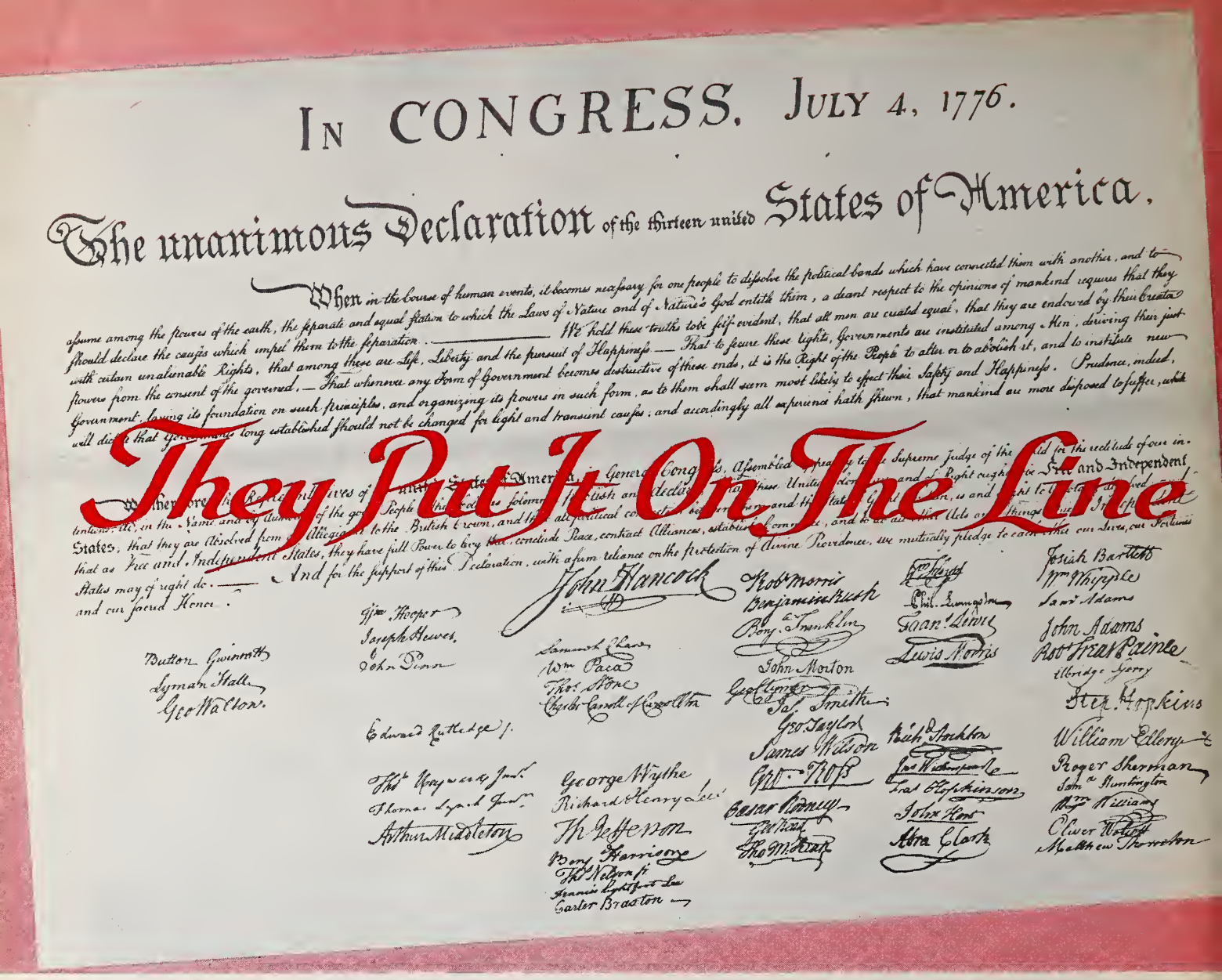


By T. R. FEHRENBACH

ON THE 7TH OF June, 1776, a slender, keen-eyed Virginia aristocrat named Richard Henry Lee rose to place a resolution before the Second Continental Congress of the United Colonies of North America, meeting in State House off Chestnut Street, in Philadelphia. Lee had his instructions from the Virginia Assembly, and he would fulfill them, but this was one of the hardest days of his life. The 13 British colonies of America were already far gone in rebellion against what they considered the tyranny of the English Parliament. The shots heard round the world had been fired at Lexington and Concord; blood had flowed at Breed's Hill in Boston.

Lee still believed there was time to compromise with the British Government. But, acting on instructions of his State, he stood and proposed: "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."

This was no longer opposition to Parliament. It was revolution against the Crown.

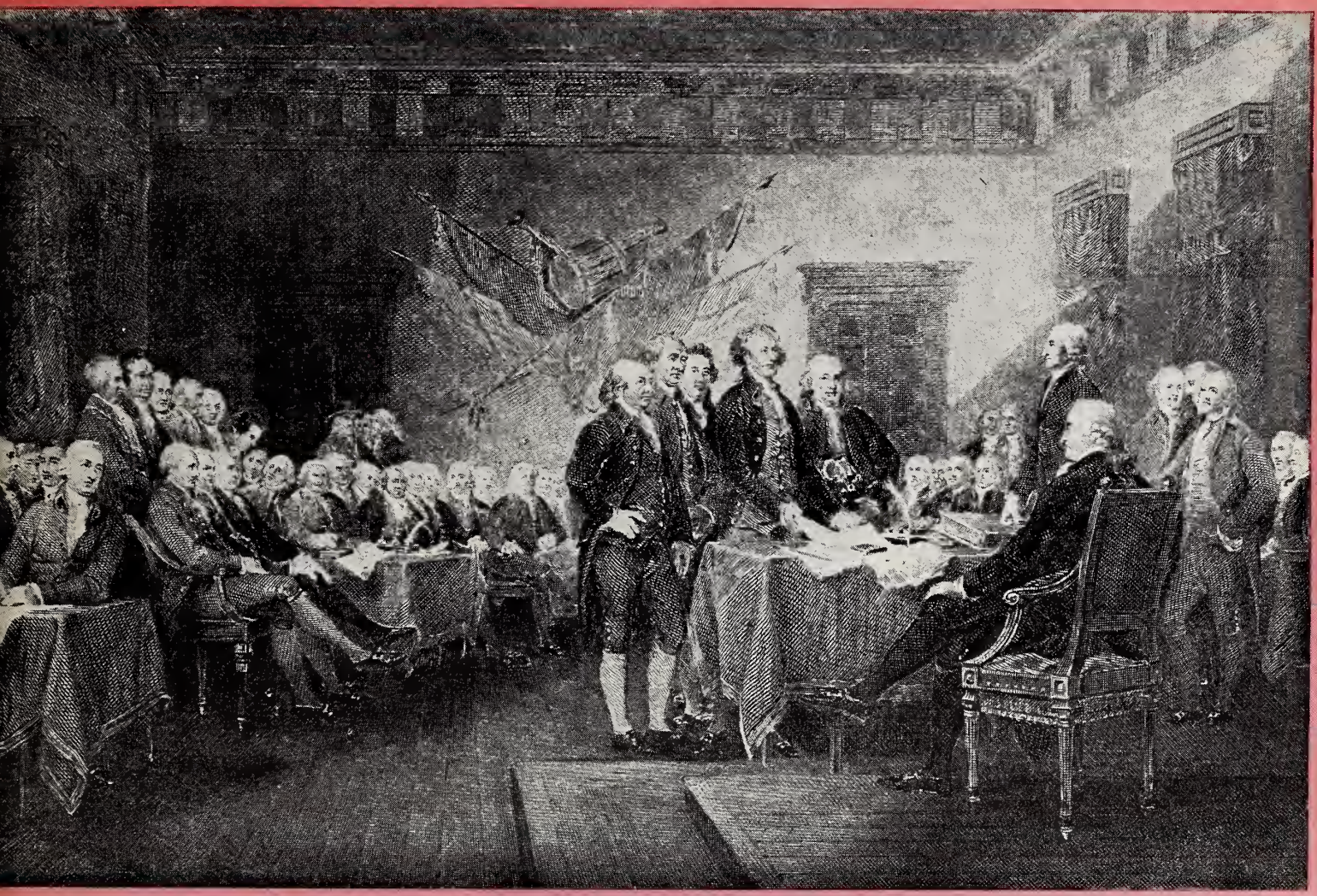
American histories sometimes gloss over the fact that passage of the Declaration of Independence was by no means assured. Many of the men assembled in Philadelphia were at best reluctant rebels. There were many moderates among them, men desperately aware of, and fearful of, the fruits of war. Immediately after Lee made his proposal, a majority of the Congress stood against it. It took four days of the passion and brilliance of the Adamses of Massachusetts and other patriots such as Virginian Thomas Jefferson to secure a bare majority of one—and then, on a South Carolina resolution, the matter was postponed until the 1st of July.

Many men hoped it had been postponed forever. . . .

What happened was that in the course of human events the hour had grown later than many of the gentlemen sitting in Philadelphia had realized. State after state instructed delegates to stand for Independence, even though some states held back to the last, and finally four delegates resigned rather than approve such a move.

After four world-shaking days in July, Thomas Jefferson's shining document was adopted without a dissenting vote, and on July 4, John Hancock signed it as President of Congress, Charles Thomson, Secretary, attesting. Four days later, July 8, "freedom was proclaimed throughout the land."

The Declaration of Independence was ordered engrossed on parch-



ment, and August 2, 1776, was set for its formal signing by the 56 members of Congress. The actual signing of such a document, under British or any other law of the time, was a formal act of treason against the Crown. But every member eventually—some were absent on August 2—signed.

What sort of men were these, who pledged their "Lives, Fortunes, and Sacred Honor," with a British fleet already at anchor in New York harbor?

For rebels, they were a strange breed. Almost all of them had a great deal of all three things they pledged. Ben Franklin was the only really old man among them; 18 were still under 40, and three still in their twenties. Twenty-four were jurists or lawyers. Eleven were merchants, and nine were landowners or rich farmers. The rest were doctors, ministers or politicians. With only a very few exceptions, like Samuel Adams of Massachusetts, whom well-wishers furnished a new suit so he might be presentable in Congress, they were men of substantial property. All but two had families, and the vast majority were men of education and standing. In general, each came from what would now be called the "power structure" of his home state. They had security as few men had it in the 18th century.

Each man had far more to lose from revolution than he had to gain from it—except where principle and honor were concerned. It was principle, not property, that brought these men to Philadelphia. In no other light can the American Revolution be understood.

John Hancock, who had inherited a great fortune and who already had a price of 500 pounds on his head, signed in enormous letters, so "that His Majesty could now read his name without glasses, and could now double the reward." There was more than one reference to gallows humor that day in August.

Ben Franklin said, "Indeed we must all hang together. Otherwise we shall most assuredly hang separately."

And fat Benjamin Harrison of Virginia told tiny Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, "With me it will all be over in a minute. But you, you'll be dancing on air an hour after I'm gone!" These men knew what they risked. The penalty for treason was death by hanging.

William Ellery of Rhode Island was curious to see the signers' faces as they committed this supreme act of courage. He inched his way close to the secretary who held the parchment and watched intently. He saw some men sign quickly, to get it done with, and others dramatically draw the moment out. But in no face, as he said, was he able to discern real fear. Stephen Hopkins, Ellery's colleague from Rhode Is-

land, was a man past 60 and signed with a shaking hand. But he snapped, "My hand trembles, but my heart does not!" . . . .

Whatever else they did, they formalized what had been a brush-popping revolt and gave it life and meaning, and created a new nation, through one supreme act of courage. Everyone knows what came of the nation they set in motion that day. Ironically, not many Americans know what became of these men, or even who they were.

Some prospered. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams went on to become Presidents. Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Josiah Bartlett, Oliver Wolcott, Edward Rutledge, Benjamin Harrison and Elbridge Gerry lived to become state governors. Gerry died in office as Monroe's Vice President. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Md., who was the richest man in Congress in 1776, and who risked the most, founded the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1828. Most Americans have heard these names.

Other signers were not so fortunate.

The British, even before the list was published, marked down all members of Congress suspected of having put their names to treason. They all became the objects of vicious manhunts. Some were taken; some, like Jefferson, had narrow escapes. All of those who had families or property in areas where British power flowed during the war which followed, suffered.

None actually was hanged. There were too many Britons, like William Pitt, the old Earl of Chatham, who even during a vicious and brutal war would not have stood for that. . . .

The four delegates from New York State were all men of vast property, and they signed the Declaration with a British fleet standing only miles from their homes. By August 2, 1776, the government of New York had already evacuated New York City for White Plains. . . .

The British landed three divisions on Long Island on August 27. In a bloody battle, Washington's untrained militia was driven back to Harlem Heights. British and Hessian soldiers now plundered the mansion of signer Francis Lewis at Whitestone; they set it afire and carried his wife away. Mrs. Lewis was treated with great brutality. Though she was exchanged for two British prisoners through the efforts of Congress, she died from the effects of what had been done to her.

British troops next occupied the extensive estate of William Floyd, though his wife and children were able to escape across Long Island Sound to Connecticut. Here they lived as refugees for seven years, without income, and eventually came home to find a devastated ruin, "despoiled of almost everything but the naked soil."

Signer Philip Livingston , came from a baronial New York family, and Livingston himself had built up an immensely lucrative import business. All his business property in New York City was seized as Washington retreated south to Jersey, and Livingston's town house on Duke Street and his country estate on Brooklyn Heights were confiscated. Livingston's family was driven out, becoming homeless refugees, while he himself continued to sell off his remaining property in an effort to maintain the United States' credit. Livingston died in 1778, still working in Congress for the cause.

John Adams, Jefferson, Franklin, Robert Livingston and Sherman.

The fourth New Yorker, Lewis Morris of Westchester County, saw all his timber, crops and livestock taken, and he was barred from his home for seven years. He continued fighting as a brigadier general in the New York militia.

As Washington's men commenced their painful retreat across New Jersey, it began to seem that the Revolution would fail. Now American Tories or Loyalists to the Crown began to make themselves known, helping the advancing British and Hessians to ferret out the property and families of the Jersey signers. When John Hart of Trenton risked coming to the bedside of his dying wife, he was betrayed.

Hessians rode after Hart. He escaped into the woods, but the soldiers rampaged over his large farm, tearing down his grist mills, wrecking his house, while Mrs. Hart lay on her deathbed. Hart, a man of 65, was hunted down across the countryside and slept in caves and woods, accompanied only by a dog.

At last, emaciated by hardship and worry, he was able to sneak home. He found his wife long buried. His 13 children had been taken away. A broken man, John Hart died in 1779 without ever finding his family.

Another New Jersey signer, Abraham Clark, a self-made man, gave two officer sons to the Revolutionary Army. They were captured and sent to the British prison hulk in New York harbor—the hellship *Jersey*, where 11,000 American captives were to die. The younger Clarks were treated with especial brutality because of their father. One was put in solitary and given no food. The British authorities offered the elder Clark their lives if he would recant and come out for King and Parliament. He refused.

When they occupied Princeton, N. J., the British billeted troops in the College of New Jersey's Nassau Hall. Signer Dr. John Witherspoon was President of the college, later called Princeton. The soldiers trampled and burned Witherspoon's fine college library, much of which had been brought from Scotland.

But Witherspoon's good friend, signer Richard Stockton, suffered far worse. Stockton, a State Supreme Court justice, had rushed back to his estate, Morven, near Princeton, in an effort to evacuate his wife and children. The Stockton family found refuge with friends—but a Tory sympathizer betrayed them. Judge Stockton was pulled from bed in the night and brutally beaten by the arresting soldiers. Then he was thrown into a common jail, where he was deliberately starved.

A horrified Congress finally arranged for Stockton's parole, but not before his health was ruined. Finally the judge was released as an invalid who could no longer harm the British cause. He went back to Morven. He found the estate looted, his furniture and all his personal possessions burned; his library, the finest private library in America, destroyed. His horses had been stolen, and even the hiding place of the family silver had been bullied out of the servants. The house itself still stood; eventually it was to become the official residence of New Jersey's governors.

Richard Stockton did not live to see the triumph of the Revolution. He soon died, and his family was forced to live off charity.

About this same time, the British

Sign! Sign! You Are Free!

PATRICK HENRY of Virginia is best remembered for his ringing words "Give Me Liberty, or Give me Death!" but that may not have been his most important speech.

As the members of the Continental Congress reassembled at Philadelphia in early July of 1776 it was not a foregone conclusion that the Declaration of Independence would be ratified. Certainly few expected unanimous endorsement.

Then, as the signing ceremony was about to begin on July 4, Patrick Henry rose to make one last passionate plea. Like the Declaration of Independence itself, his words have inspired millions.

"These words will go forth to the world when our bones are dust. To the slave in bondage they will speak hope; to the mechanic in his workshop, freedom.

"That parchment will speak to kings in language sad and terrible as the trumpet of the archangel. You have trampled on the rights of mankind long enough. At last, the voice of human woe has pierced the ear of God, and called his judgment down.

"Such is the message of the Declaration to the kings of the world. And shall we falter now? And shall we start back appalled when our free people press the very threshold of freedom?

"Sign! if the next moment the gibbet's rope is around your neck. Sign! by all your hopes in life or death, as husbands, fathers—as men with our names to the parchment, or be accursed forever! Sign! not only for yourselves, but for all ages; for that parchment will be the textbook of freedom—the Bible of the rights of man forever.

"Sign! for the declaration will go forth to American hearts like the voice of God. And its work will not be done until throughout this wide continent not a single inch of ground owns the sway of privilege of power.

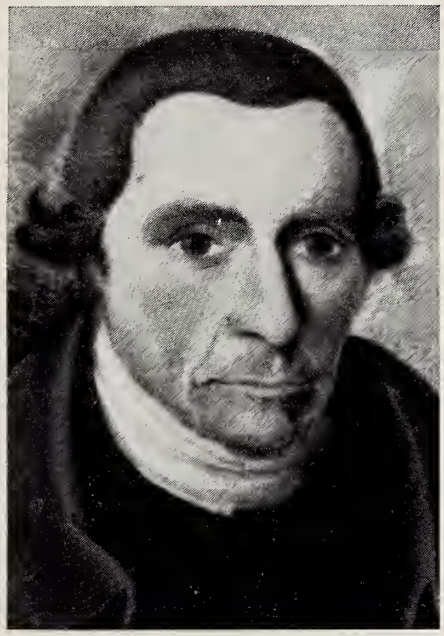
"It is not given to our poor human intellect to climb the skies, to pierce the councils of the Almighty one. But methinks I stand among the awful clouds which veil the brightness of Jehovah's throne. Methinks I see the recording angel—pale as angel is pale, weeping as an angel can weep—come trembling up to the throne and speaking his dreadful message.

"Father! The old world is baptized in blood. Father! It is drenched with the blood of millions who have been executed, in slow and grinding oppression. Father, look! With one glance of thine eternal eye, look over Europe, Asia, Africa and behold everywhere a terrible sight—man trodden down beneath the oppressor's feet, nations lost in blood, murder, and superstition walking hand in hand, over the graves of their victims, and not a single voice to whisper hope to man.

"He stands there (the angel), his hand trembling with the human guilt.

"But hark! The voice of Jehovah speaks out from the awful cloud: Let there be light again. Let there be a new world. Tell my people, the poor downtrodden millions, to go out from the old world to build up my altar in the new.

"As God lives, my friend, I believe that to be his voice. Yes, were my soul trembling on the wing of eternity, were this hand freezing to death, were my voice choking with the last struggle, I would still, with the last gasp of that voice, implore you to remember the truth! God has given America to be free. Yes, as I sank down into the gloomy shadows of the grave, with my last gasp I would beg you to sign that parchment. In the name of the One who made you, the Saviour who redeemed you, in the name of the millions whose very breath is now hushed, as, in intense expectation, they look up to you for the awful words, YOU ARE FREE!"



Patrick Henry

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sent a party to the home of New Jersey signer Francis Hopkinson at Bordentown, and looted it, also.

By December 1776, Washington's dwindling band of patriots had been pushed across the Delaware, into Pennsylvania. The Revolution had entered its first great period of crisis. One by one, the important people of Philadelphia were mouthing Loyalist sentiments, or concocting private ways of making their peace with the Crown. But signer Robert Morris, the merchant prince of Philadelphia, was not among these. Morris, who had honestly and sincerely opposed the Declaration of Independence because he felt the colonies were unready but who had signed in the end, was working his heart and his credit out for the Revolution. Washington's troops were unprovisioned and unpaid; the United Colonies' credit, such as it was, had collapsed.

Morris used all his great personal wealth and prestige to keep the finances of the Revolution going. More than once he was to be almost solely responsible for keeping Washington in the field, and in December 1776, Morris raised the arms and provisions which made it possible for Washington to cross the Delaware and surprise the Hessian Colonel Rall at Trenton. . . .

Morris was to meet Washington's appeals and pleas year after year. In the process, he was to lose 150 ships at sea, and bleed his own fortune and credit almost dry.

In the summer of 1777 the British . . . landed troops south of Philadelphia, on Chesapeake Bay. These marched north, to defeat Washington at Brandywine and again at Germantown. Congress fled to Baltimore, and Lord Howe took Philadelphia on September 27. On the way, his men despoiled the home of Pennsylvania signer George Clymer in Chester County. Clymer and his family, however, made good their escape.

The family of another signer, Dr. Benjamin Rush, was also forced to

flee to Maryland, though Rush himself stayed on as a surgeon with the Army. . . .

Signer John Morton, who had long been a Tory in his views, lived in a strongly Loyalist area of the state. When Morton had come out for Independence, it turned his neighbors, most of his friends and even his relatives against him, and these people, who were closest to Morton, ostracized him. He was a sensitive, troubled man, and many observers believed this action killed him. John Morton died in 1777. His last words to his tormentors were, "Tell them that they will live to see the hour when they shall acknowledge it [the signing] to have been the most glorious service that I ever rendered to my country."

On the same day Washington retook Trenton, the British captured Newport, R. I. Here, they wantonly destroyed all of signer William Ellery's property, and burned his fine home to the ground.

The grand scheme to separate New England by General Burgoyne's march from Canada was foiled at Saratoga in 1777; this victory eventually brought the French into the war on the American side. But . . . by 1779 the British seemed to have the war well in hand . . . The seaports were captured or blockaded, and American shipping driven from the seas. The northern colonies seemed neutralized, and the British turned their main effort south.

Like the men from New York, the South Carolina signers were all landed aristocrats. They had, as a body, reflected Carolina's luke-warm attitude toward independence. The Carolinians were all young—average age, 29—and all had studied in England. But in the end they had joined the majority in the interest of solidarity, and after signing they had all entered military service.

While serving as a company commander, Thomas Lynch Jr.'s health broke from privation and exposure. His doctors ordered him to seek a cure in Europe, and on the voyage he and his young wife were drowned at sea.

The other three South Carolina signers, Edward Rutledge, Arthur Middleton and Thomas Heyward Jr., were taken by the British in the siege of Charleston. They were carried as prisoners of war to St. Augustine, Fla., and here they were singled out for indignities until they were exchanged at the end of the war. Meanwhile, the British roaming through the Southern countryside made a point of devastating the properties and plantations of the Rutledge and Middleton families. . . .

The British soon conquered all the thin coastal strip which was 18th century Georgia. Signer Button Gwinnett was killed in a duel in 1777, and Col. George Walton, fighting for Savannah, was severely wounded and captured when that city fell. The home of the third Georgia signer, Lyman Hall, was burned and his rice plantation confiscated in the name of the Crown.

One of the North Carolina signers, Joseph Hewes, died in Philadelphia while still in Congress, some said from worry and overwork. The home of another, William Hooper, was occupied by the enemy, and his family was driven into hiding.

By 1780 the fortunes of war had begun to change. Local American militia forces defeated the King's men at King's Mountain. Realizing that the war was to be decided in the South, Washington sent Nathanael Greene to dance, as the saying went, with Lt. Gen. Lord Cornwallis, the British commander. Cornwallis did not like the dance at all, and slowly retreated northward toward the Chesapeake. At Yorktown, a Virginia village surrounded on three sides by water, Cornwallis established what he thought was an impregnable base.

Now began the crucial action of the war, the time Washington had been waiting for with exquisite patience. A powerful French squadron under Admiral De Grasse arrived at the mouth of the Chesapeake from Haiti and gained temporary naval superiority off the Virginia coast. Under carefully coordinated plans, Washington and the French General Rochambeau marched south from New York to Annapolis, where De Grasse transported the allied army across Chesapeake Bay. At the same time, General the Marquis de Lafayette was ordered to march upon Yorktown from his position at Richmond.

As the bombardment commenced, signer Thomas Nelson of Virginia was at the front in command of the Virginia militia forces. In 1776 Nelson had been an immensely wealthy tobacco planter and merchant in partnership with a man named Reynolds. His home, a stately Georgian mansion, was in Yorktown. As the Revolution began, Nelson 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 York, of which I am Lieutenant, I will wait for no orders, but will summon the militia and drive the invaders into the sea." Nelson succeeded Thomas Jefferson as governor of Virginia, and was still governor in 1781.

Lord Cornwallis and his staff had moved their headquarters into Nelson's home.

Nelson asked the gunners: "Why do you spare my house?"

"Sir, out of respect to you," a gunner replied.

"Give me the cannon!" Nelson roared. At his insistence, the cannon fired on his magnificent house and smashed it.

But for Thomas Nelson the sacrifice was not quite over. He had raised $2 million for the Revolutionary cause by pledging his own estates. The loans came due; a newer peacetime Congress refused to honor them, and Nelson's property was forfeit. He was never reimbursed.

He died a few years later at the age of 50, living with his large family in a small and modest house.

Another Virginia signer, Carter Braxton, was also ruined. His property, mainly consisting of sailing ships, was seized and never recovered.

These were the men who were later to be called "reluctant" rebels. Most of them had not wanted trouble with the Crown. But when they were caught up in it, they had willingly pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor for the sake of their country.

It was no idle pledge. Of the 56 who signed the Declaration of Independence, nine died of wounds or hardships during the war.

Five were captured and imprisoned, in each case with brutal treatment.

Several lost wives, sons or family. One lost his 13 children. All were, at one time or another, the victims of manhunts.

Twelve signers had their houses burned. Seventeen lost everything.

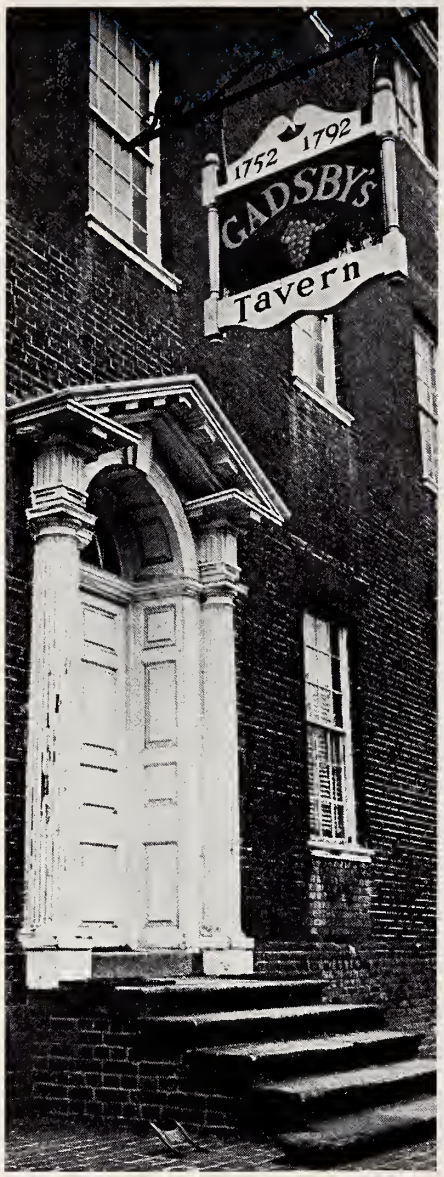
Not one defected or went back on his pledged word.

Their honor and the nation they did so much to create, is still intact.

But freedom, on that first Fourth of July, came high. THE END

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted from the July, 1965 issue of The American Legion Magazine at the request of many Legionnaires, members of The American Legion Auxiliary and civic-minded Americans, particularly teachers.

Washington's Legion Post



Entrance to Gadsby's


Having lunch at Gadsby's are, l to r, Barny Gollinger, past Virginia Dept. Adjt.; William R. Adam, curator for Gadsby's; Earl Parrish, Post 24 Commander; and William McNamara, Gadsby's president.

Nearly 50 years ago, Post 24, Alexandria, VA, rescued a famous landmark, a favorite haunt of George Washington, and initiated a project which takes center stage in the Bicentennial. It was climaxed Feb. 16 when historic Gadsby's Tavern was officially opened to the public to honor George Washington's 244th birthday.

In 1928, the Post bought the Tavern when it was about to be demolished. In 1972, it turned it over to the city of Alexandria, which has since spent over $1.2 million for refurbishments.

During this year's celebrations visitors to the Nation's Capitol will have Post 24 to thank for an opportunity to visit and dine at this famous landmark where Washington and other patriots met.

Washington patronized the original coffee house as early as 1754. He was feted many times there after the Tavern was remodeled in 1770 to include two parlors, a tap room, an assembly hall and two enlarged bedrooms. In 1793, a three and one-half story hotel was added containing two parlors, two dining rooms, a ball room and 12 guest rooms.

Just prior to Washington's death in 1799, Gadsby's was the scene of a day-long celebration in honor of his two terms as president. It was his last military appearance. He reviewed the Alexandria Independent Infantry Blues, a company of volunteers.

Nearly all founders of the American Independence are said to have enjoyed the hospitality at Gadsby's. At least six Presidents held receptions there. Others known to have used its facilities were Marquis of Lafayette, John Paul Jones, Aaron Burr, George Mason, Francis Scott Key and Henry Clay.

After acquiring the properties, Post 24 financed architectural repairs and retrieved many original items. During the 1930s, the Legion operated it as a semi-public meeting house and museum under management of Gadsby's Tavern and City Hotel, Inc.

Two Legionnaires who have devoted many years to restoration are William G. McNamara and William Robert Adam. McNamara is now president of the holding corporation. Adam is curator for the properties on behalf of the City of Alexandria.

Besides the Legion and its Auxiliary, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames, the Children of the American Revolution and other organizations and individuals have been active in the restoration.


William McNamara tries 1812 piano.

In return for title to the property, Alexandria renovated and refurbished Post 24 facilities located in the hotel portion of the building. Included is taproom, ballroom and offices for both the Legion and Auxiliary. More than $60,000 worth of kitchen and food equipment was supplied and the Post now has free rent for its lifetime.

Gadsby's operates as a museum charging small admission fee to defray operating costs. The first floor is a commercial dining area serving traditional early American foods and beverages.

"Legionnaire Of Month"

Robert J. Miller, a World War I veteran and post service officer for over 41 years, has been selected "Legionnaire Of Month" for July. Miller is a charter member, past commander, adjutant and finance officer of Nittany Post 245, State College, PA. A graduate pharmacist, he owned and operated his own drug store for 13 years. He then served as city postmaster for 27 years. Miller lives with wife Gladys at 318 W. Nittany Ave., State College.

Miller is first "Legionnaire Of Month" selected under a new monthly feature in the news section of The American Legion Magazine. Nominations are solicited and should be sent to editor for consideration.