Virginia’s Seven Signers of the Declaration of Independence
George Wythe
Richard Henry Lee
Th. Jefferson
Mary Harrison
Francis Lightfoot Lee
Carlos Braxton
George Wythe

Born: 1726

Birthplace:

Elizabeth City Co. (Hampton) Virginia

Education: Informal Study of Law

Occupation: Lawyer, Educator
Wythe married 1st to Ann Lewis (ca.1747) She died a year later.

In 1755, he married Elizabeth Taliaferro of Powhatan, whose father had built a dignified house on the Palace Green (near the Governor’s Palace) that they occupied for many years before it became legally theirs at his death.
Governor’s Palace on “Palace Green” in Williamsburg
In 1776, the Wythe house accommodated Virginia General Assembly delegate Thomas Jefferson and his family.

The Wythe house also served as General George Washington's headquarters before the British surrender at Yorktown.
Wythe’s Political Career

Admitted to the Bar in Virginia, 1746;

Attorney General of Virginia, 1753;

Member of the House of Burgesses; 1755-65;

Served as mayor of Williamsburg from 1768 to 1769;
Wythe's Political Career (Cont.)

1st Professor of Law in America, William and Mary College, 1769-1789;

Elected to Continental Congress, 1775-76; Signed Declaration

Speaker of the Virginia House, 1777-78;

Judge of the Chancery Court of Virginia, 1789-1806
Wren building at William & Mary College
Wythe’s Private Life

• Born to Wealthy Agricultural Family
• Parents die before he’s a teenager
• Dropped out of Wm & Mary College due to poor financial status
• Studied Informally & Admitted to Bar in Spottsylvania, Co. in 1746 at age of 20
Wythe’s Private Life (cont):

• Friends & Students Included: Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay, James Monroe, John Marshall, etc.

• Freed and provided for his former slaves before his death

• Died in 1806 at the age of 80
Sometime after 1789, Wythe designed the State Seal of Virginia inscribed with the motto “Sic Semper Tyrannis” (meaning “thus always to tyrants“).

It is still in use today and appears on the State flag.
The two figures are acting out the meaning of the motto. Both are dressed as warriors. The woman, Virtue, represents Virginia. The man holding a scourge and chain shows that he is a tyrant. His fallen crown is nearby.
Wythe left his extraordinary book collection to Thomas Jefferson who said:

"He was my ancient master, my earliest and best friend, and to him I am indebted for first impressions which have [been] the most salutary [i.e., influential] on the course of my life."
Richard Henry Lee

Born:
January 20, 1732

Birthplace: Stratford Hall
Westmoreland County, Va.

Education:
Private School at Wakefield, Yorkshire, England. (Farmer)
Richard Henry Lee (Key Facts, cont.)

Political Career:
- Justice of the peace, 1757;
- Virginia House of Burgesses, 1757;
- Continental Congress, 1774;
- First US Senator from Virginia, 1789.

Died: June 19, 1794
Richard Henry Lee’s Private/Public Life:

- Born Aristocratic Family at Stratford in Westmoreland Co., Va
- Attended Private School in England
- One of “Radicals” that met at Raleigh Tavern when House was dissolved
Stratford Hall, Westmoreland Co., Virginia
Raleigh Tavern,
Williamsburg, VA
(After Restoration)
Richard Henry Lee’s Political Career (cont):

• 1774 attended 1st Continental Congress
• Offered 1st Resolutions for Independence to the Congress in 1776
• Served in the Congress throughout the Revolutionary War
• 1783 was elected President of the Continental Congress (i.e., President of the US in Congress Assembled)
Richard Henry Lee shown sitting (1st on left) during the presentation of the Declaration of Independence by the drafting Committee of Congress (including Thomas Jefferson) in Trumbull’s famous painting of the “signers”.
Richard Henry Lee’s Political Career (cont):

• A “States-rights, Anti-federalist”, he opposed adoption of the Federal Constitution

• Elected 1st Senator to the US Congress from Virginia

• Died at age of 62
Family Ties

Richard married first to Anne Aylett (1738-1768), daughter of William Aylett and Elizabeth Eskridge. The couple had four surviving children. Anne died December 12, 1768 at Chantille, Westmoreland Co., Virginia.

Richard married second to Anne (Gaskins) Pinckard. The couple had five surviving children.
Jefferson was the third President of the United States (1801–1809), the principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776), and one of the most influential Founding Fathers for his promotion of the ideals of Republicanism in the United States. Major events during his presidency include the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804–1806) and the failed Embargo Act of 1807.
Committee of Congress drafting the Declaration of Independence (Left to Right: Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, and John Adams)
Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson “Drafting the Declaration”
House where Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration

(Near 7th & Market Sts., Philadelphia, PA)
Presenting the “Declaration of Independence” to Congress

John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin.
As a political philosopher, Jefferson idealized the independent yeoman farmer as exemplar of the republican virtue, distrusted cities and financiers, and favored states' rights and a strictly limited federal government. He supported the separation of church and state and was the author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.
Jefferson built his home at Monticello on the Rivanna River between Richmond and Charlottesville, Virginia.
In 1781, he retired to Monticello to write, work on improved agriculture, and attend his wife. It was during this time that he worked on “Notes on the State of Virginia”, a work that he never finished. His wife Martha Jefferson died in September of 1782.
In 1803, President Jefferson bought all French lands on the tributaries of the Mississippi River including New Orleans for $15 million dollars (i.e., the Louisiana Purchase) Lewis & Clark explored this area from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean at the request of Mr. Jefferson.
The **Louisiana Purchase** extended the boundaries of the United States and established the doctrine of “**manifest destiny**” (i.e., that the US was destined to encompass all lands between the Atlantic & Pacific oceans).
Lewis & Clark - -
Voyage of Discovery
University of Virginia (Jefferson’s Pet Project - - Western Perspective View)
Benjamin Harrison V

Born: April 5, 1726

Birthplace: Berkeley, Virginia

Education: Attended William & Mary College

Work: Politician & Farmer
Ancestors Celebrated First Thanksgiving in America

On December 4th, 1619, thirty-eight colonists from Berkeley Parish in England disembarked in Virginia and gave thanks to God for a safe voyage.
Berkeley Plantation on the James River, VA
Parlor at Berkeley Plantation
Dining Room at Berkeley Plantation, VA
Benjamin Harrison’s Political Career

Virginia House of Burgesses 1764;
Member of Continental Congress, 1774-77 – Signed Declaration of Independence;
House of Burgesses 1777 (Elected Speaker in 1778);
Governor of Virginia 1782-84 & 1791.
Family Ties

Benjamin Harrison V was the son of Benjamin Harrison IV and Ann Carter (daughter of Virginia tobacco planter -- Robert “King” Carter I).

Benjamin married his second cousin Elizabeth Bassett. Their children were: William Henry, Elizabeth, Anna, Benjamin, Lucy, Carter, and Sarah.

His brother-in-law was Peyton Randolph.
Robert Carter I also known as “King” Carter (1663 – August 4, 1732) was a colonist in Virginia and had become one of the wealthiest men in the colonies. As President of the Governor's Council of the Virginia Colony, he was acting Governor in 1726-1727 after the death in office of Governor Drysdale.

Robert Carter

Elizabeth Landon Carter

Robert and Elizabeth had 10 children including Ann Carter (1702-1745) who married Benjamin Harrison IV and died on August 12, 1745; {parents of Benjamin Harrison V and grandparents of President William Henry Harrison.}
Benjamin suffered with gout during his later years and he died in 1791 at the age of 65.

His son, William Henry Harrison, was elected 9th President of the United States.
Benjamin Harrison VI
(the fifth Benjamin’s Great-Grandson became the 23rd President of the United States 1889 – 1893)
Thomas Nelson, Jr.

Born: December 26, 1738

Birthplace: Yorktown, Virginia

Education: Private, in England (Graduate of Cambridge University)

Died: 1789 in Hanover Co., VA
Family Ties

In 1762, Nelson returned from England, married Lucy Grymes (daughter of Philip Grymes of Middlesex Co., VA and Mary Randolph of Gloucester Co., VA), built a mansion in Yorktown and they had 11 children.
Nelson House in Yorktown, Virginia
Political Career

Member of the House of Burgesses, 1774; attended the Virginia provincial Convention, 1775;

Officer and Commander of the Virginia Militia during Revolutionary War, 1775...

Delegate to the Continental Congress, 1775-77 & 1779 (signed Declaration);

Elected Governor of Virginia, 1781.
Thomas Nelson was one of the 89 “Radical” members of the House of Burgesses who met in protest at the Raleigh tavern when the Virginia House was dissolved by the royal Governor.

As member of the Virginia provincial convention in 1775, he organized the Virginia Militia and became its first Commander.
Revolutionary War Fighting
In 1781, General Nelson succeeded Thomas Jefferson and served as both Civil Governor of Virginia and Commander in Chief of the Virginia Militia.

Both the Continental Army and the French forces utilized the skills of these Virginia militia units during the Siege of Yorktown.
Storming the Redoubt at Yorktown, Virginia
Nelson himself Commanded Virginia’s Militia at the final siege of Yorktown. He urged General Washington to fire on his own home, the Nelson House, where Cornwallis had his HQ.

Nelson even offered five guineas to the first man to hit his house.
Francis Lightfoot Lee

Born: Oct. 14, 1734

Birthplace: Westmoreland Co., Virginia

Education: Private (Farmer)

Died: Jan. 11, 1797
Family Ties

In 1722, Thomas Lee (Thomas Ludwell, Richard Henry & Francis Lightfoot’s father) married a member of the Harrison family, Hannah Harrison Ludwell (1701-1749) at "Greenspring", James City Co., Virginia
Political Career

Member of the Virginia House of Burgesses 1758-75;

Elected to Continental Congress, 1775-79 (signed Declaration);

Member of Virginia Senate.
Francis Lightfoot Lee was younger brother of Richard Henry Lee. Francis was a noted “Radical” and sided with Patrick Henry in opposing the British Stamp Act.

In Congress, Francis often opposed positions taken by his brother.
Family Ties

In 1769, Francis married a girl of 16, **Rebecca Tayloe**, one of the eight daughters of John Tayloe II of Mount Airy Plantation.
Tayloe of Mount Airy Plantation

The Tayloe were the most significant racehorse breeding family of the Revolutionary War period.

Important Tayloe horses included: Childers, Leviathan, the great sire Sir Archy (USA) (1805).
Sir Archy (Sire of Sires in America)

Sir Archy’s progeny extended from Timoleon (USA) (1814), to Boston (USA) (1833), to the great American Thoroughbred foundation sire Lexington (USA) (1850).
Menokin

As a marriage gift, John Tayloe II gave the couple a 1,000 ac plantation and mansion home called “Menokin” which is located four miles northwest of Warsaw, Virginia. Nearby is Stratford Hall Plantation, the ancestral home of the Lee family and the childhood home of Francis Lightfoot Lee.

Both Lees died without children in 1797, and their property was left to the heirs of Francis Lee.
Carter Braxton

Born: Sept. 10, 1736

Birthplace: Newington Plantation, VA

Education: William & Mary College (Farmer)

Died: Oct. 10, 1797
Parents

His father, George Braxton, was a wealthy planter of Newington, in the County of King and Queen, in Virginia,

His mother was Mary (Carter) Braxton, 13th daughter of Robert “King” Carter I, who was for some time a member and then president of the King's Council.
Political Career

Virginia House of Burgesses, 1770-85;
Delegate to the Continental Congress, 1774-75;
Member, Virginia Patriot's Committee of Safety, 1774;
Signer of the Declaration of Independence, 1776.
Family Ties

Carter married a 19-year old, wealthy heiress named Judith Robinson (the daughter of Christopher & Judith Robinson, wealthy planters of the county of Middlesex). They had two daughters and she died 2 years later (ca. 1758.)

After returning from a trip to England in 1760, he married Elizabeth Corbin (the eldest daughter of British Col. Richard and Elizabeth (Taylooe) Corbin from Laneville) by whom he had sixteen children. She died in 1814
Revolutionary Thoughts

Public Virtue: Braxton feared an “excess of democracy”. He said democracy depended on public virtue which he defined as “a disinterested attachment to the public good, exclusive and independent of all private and selfish interests” He felt that “public virtue might not long endure in America.”
Public Service

Braxton loaned and lost most of his fortune to the cause of revolution (i.e., in Privateering) and his plantations were destroyed by the British during the Revolutionary War.

Yankee “Clipper ship” used for Privateering during Rev. War
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