

What happened to signers of Declaration?

DEAR ANN: I received this from a friend. I don't know who wrote it, but it might be appropriate for the Fourth of July — Independence Day.
— ELLEN IN NEW JERSEY

DEAR ELLEN: Thank you for a perfect July 4th column. Here it is:

ANN LANDERS

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 before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons who served in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War. They 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 plantation owners. All were men of means and well-educated, but they signed the Declaration of Independence, knowing 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 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 constantly. He served in the Congress without pay,

and his family was kept in hiding. Poverty was his reward.

Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Ellery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnet, Heyward, Rutledge and Middleton.

At the Battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. noted that the British Gen. Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged Gen. Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

The home of Francis Lewis was destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from the bedside of his dying wife. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and gristmill 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 gone. He died shortly thereafter, heartbroken. Morris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-raising ruffians. They were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. They pledged "for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of the divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

They gave us a free and independent America. We were British subjects, and we fought against our own government. Too often, we now take these liberties for granted.

So — while you are enjoying the the July 4th holiday, take a few minutes and silently thank these patriots for their heroic contributions. It is not too much to ask for the price they paid. Freedom is never free.

Send questions to Ann Landers,
Box 11562, Chicago, IL 60611-0562.