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FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS 2000[©]

Robert W. Smiley, Jr., Chairman

To commemorate the continuing significance of the Fourth of July, here are four more reflections about the men who took risks that few had ever experienced by siding with the cause of liberty. These men put their lives, families, and futures on the line for nothing but the hope of bringing liberty to our land.

While enjoying the Independence Day holiday, please take a few minutes to silently thank these patriots. They deserve such consideration for the price they paid. And they deserve your appreciation.

Yes, these brief reflections may seem long, but the cost of a few minutes of reading is substantially less than the price these patriots paid for our own inherited liberty. Please take a few minutes, while enjoying the Fourth of July holiday, to silently thank these men. It's not too much to ask for the price they paid.

They deserve our appreciation.

FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS

JULY 4, 2000

Francis Lewis, New York

Born: March 1713, Llandaff, Wales

Died: 31 December 1802

Francis Lewis, a wealthy merchant with roots in England, also suffered for his belief in liberty for all. Orphaned at birth, Lewis was raised by his relatives in Wales and sent to Cambridge for schooling, after which he started a successful trading company based in London. Lewis' business pursuits soon brought him to all parts of the world including his future home in New York where he was able to contribute his signature to the Declaration. Throughout his life Lewis had served his native Britain well by voyaging to dangerous and far-off places in order to fulfill the business contracts he had with the British army. Lewis himself was captured by French allied Indians near Montreal but remained steadfast in his allegiance to Britannia. For his courage Lewis was given a land grant in New York as well as a tidy sum of money. Wealthy, as well as a friend to the Crown, Lewis could well have left the trappings of the revolution to other, more patriotic men but instead gave the Declaration his signature and his blessing. Like other unfortunate signers, Lewis' actions brought the English army to his Long Island home where all his earthly possessions were destroyed. Unlike other signers, however, the British arrested Lewis' wife and without trial put her in prison for several months. By order of Washington Lewis' wife was returned but her health had gone forever. In 1779, only two years after her return Mrs. Lewis went to her grave as a result of her mistreatment at the British prison. Although he lived to be 89, Lewis never remarried.

William Ellery, Rhode Island

Born: 22 December 1727, Newport, Rhode Island

Died: 15 February 1820

Following graduation from Harvard in 1747 with a degree in law, Ellery began his fledgling political career as a State Naval officer in Rhode Island and slowly worked his way up through other positions until he was called to the 2nd Continental Congress in May 1776. Like many signers of the Declaration, Ellery was well aware of the consequences that could ensue from his advocating such a treasonous petition, but persevered nonetheless. He had accumulated a substantial amount of wealth through his years as both public servant and businessman in Rhode Island, and knew

that the safety of his possessions in the tiny state (the Rhode Island arsenal was miniscule compared to that of Massachusetts or Virginia) was tenuous at best. Nevertheless, he gallantly put his convictions of liberty over all his material possessions - as well as his own life.

Though many men, like Ellery, knew the risks involved upon signing the Declaration, few faced as did he the immediate danger of being captured or harmed. Strategically, Ellery's estate was incredibly vulnerable to British policing. With British barracks, forts, ports and strongholds throughout the Newport area (Rhode Island was also known for its conspicuous Loyalist streak) Ellery's fears would inevitably materialize. In December 1776 Sir Henry Clinton and other leading British Generals occupied Newport with 6,000 troops, taking care to destroy all of Ellery's property and belongings in the process. He lived to be 93.

Richard Stockton, New Jersey

Born: 1 October 1730, Near Princeton, New Jersey

Died: 28 February 1781

Few of the stories related here transmit quite the same sense of martyrdom and fallen grace, as does the telling of the horrific fate of Richard Stockton. Stockton was born into a respected and ancient family in the autumn of 1730. His great-grandfather had years before acquired a large tract of land that he built an estate upon and, in turn, became one of the most respected men in his home state of New Jersey. This estate, named Moraven, was the home of young Stockton until his move to the College of New Jersey, where he proved to be an unusually adept student in law and classical studies. Stockton moved onward and upward in his academic and financial successes, and later proved to be a brilliant and elegant lawyer in the mid-Atlantic colonies. By 1776, the year he was called to represent New Jersey at the Constitutional Convention, Stockton had reached a social and professional standing that was marveled by all. He had gained the favor of King George III upon a visit to Edinburgh and was quickly acknowledged as one of the most prosperous men in the thirteen colonies.

One might have expected a man of Stockton's social and financial standing to have been a firm Loyalist with much to lose upon the ratification of democratic principles such as those presented at the Continental Congress. Like the others, he had much at risk by associating himself with the treasonous Declaration, but Stockton was himself a Yankee at heart. Following a moving speech by John Adams in favor

of succession from the mother country, Stockton signed his convictions, his sympathies and his fate upon one of our nation's bravest and most sacred documents.

Upon a British invasion of New Jersey in 1776, Stockton's then alienated Loyalist comrades had their revenge on the patriot. His estate, which covered almost 6,000 acres, was burned to the ground. He luckily escaped with his family, but got only so far as an adjacent county whence a Tory sympathizer betrayed him and his good friend John Covenhoven. Stockton was then tortured, forced to sign an amnesty proclamation and thereafter jailed in the infamous Provost jail of New York City. There he was beaten, starved, shamed and periodically tortured. Upon his release Stockton lost much of his fortune, leaving his family with little inheritance. Robert Stockton died broken, friendless and alone in the year of 1781, only 51 years of age.

John Hart, Connecticut:

Born 1711?

Died 1779

By far one of the most tragic casualties of the Declaration, Thomas Hart was a prominent farmer and politician in his hometown of Hopewell, New Jersey. It has been said that Parliament's Stamp Tax in 1765 sparked his antagonism against direct British rule of the colonies and culminated in a political career dedicated to the patriot cause that lasted for the rest of his years. Unfortunately, it was not long after his epiphany that his life would end in the midst of a truly tragic state of affairs. Following his signing of the Declaration, the British invaded New Jersey and burned all of his possessions. In fear of his and his family's lives, Hart had his 13 children scatter while he and his wife sought refuge in the rocky woods of the Northeast. At age 70, he and his wife hid for several months in the caves and valleys of the Appalachians before she died as a result of the traumatic experience. Following American victories at Trenton and Princeton, Hart returned home only to find his estate completely wiped out and his children nowhere in sight. He died in May 1779, at age 69, without ever seeing his family again.

We hope that you appreciated the stories of these men's heroism and what they endured in the name of a brand new country that they could only hope would one day be free for all.