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FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS 2008[©]

Robert W. Smiley, Jr., Chairman

Once again, we commemorate the continuing significance of the Fourth of July by offering four more reflections about the men who did so much and gave so much in siding with the cause of liberty. We are now in our ninth year of commemorating our nation's birthday by honoring these dedicated and brave men who devoted their lives and fortunes to the creation of our United States of America. It is a time to appreciate them and their 52 fellow signers of the Declaration of Independence more than ever and to dedicate ourselves to preserving the incredible constitutional republic they prepared the way for and brought into being.

This year's most famous patriot among the four is Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence. So many of Jefferson's written words live on and should indeed provoke thought anew in this election year when decisions we citizens make will change the course of history in this period where the very survival of our way of life is seriously at risk.

This year's four from among the elite group of signers of the Declaration of Independence all lived in the State of Virginia. All committed their sacred honor to the revolutionary cause; some went on to take part in formulating the new government. Let us once again, as we enjoy Fourth of July festivities, give more than silent thanks to these men who led us out of domination to freedom and who began the framework of government that has allowed us to remain free and prosper. Let us not forget that we are privileged to live in the nation that is the greatest force for good on the face of the earth. Let us neither forget our history nor fail to bravely secure that enduring freedom for those who come after us.

Please enjoy the enclosed reflections on our four Founding Fathers from Virginia and, as you enjoy your Fourth of July Holiday 2008, remember and honor them with gratitude. And please enjoy as well our prior years' Fourth of July Reflections, which are now featured on our website: <http://benefitcapital.com/4threflections>.

Carter Braxton

Born: September 10, 1736* – Newington Plantation, Virginia

Died: October 10, 1797 – Richmond, Virginia

Carter Braxton came from privileged beginnings. While Carter was yet in his teens, upon the death of his father, George Braxton, he inherited the substantial family estate, including a prosperous tobacco plantation. He was educated at William and Mary College in Williamsburg and was a gentleman of cultivated mind and respectable talents.

When only 19, he married Judith Robinson, a wealthy heiress. She gave him two daughters, but passed away a mere two years after their wedding. Braxton then went off to England, bent on improving his mind and manners. Returning home after three years, he married Elizabeth Corbin, daughter of a British colonel who was the Receiver of Customs in Virginia for the King. Ten of their 16 children survived infancy. The same year, 1760, he was appointed to represent King William County in the Virginia House of Burgesses and was present when Patrick Henry's famous Stamp Act resolutions stirred the assembly. Braxton joined in ardent opposition to the Stamp Act, noting that his own business interests were being adversely affected.

In 1774 he was elected to the Virginia Convention that met in Williamsburg after Lord Dunmore's dissolution of the Assembly, and it was here that Braxton recommended a general congress of the colonies. In March 1775, the Virginia Convention adopted measures to defend the country.

Eight months later, Braxton was appointed to the seat in the Continental Congress that had been held by Payton Randolph, who had died while presiding over Congress. While Braxton was an early proponent for the colonies to cease commercial association with England, he was not initially in favor of total freedom from England, worrying that a possible war would be too dangerous to risk. While there is no record of how he actually voted, he did sign the Declaration of Independence on August 2, 1776.

Braxton is one of the Founding Fathers who lost much to the cause of freedom for the United States. During the War he loaned £10,000 to support the revolutionary cause. He used his wealth to sponsor shipping and privateering. He went heavily into debt. The depreciation of the Continental Currency made debts owed him worthless. The British wiped out his many shipping investments. Also, several of his plantations were destroyed during the War, and unfortunately he became involved in a number of embarrassing lawsuits. He never recovered his financial fortunes, and in 1786 was forced to sell his inherited country estate and move to a smaller home.

In June 1776, Braxton had ceased to be a delegate when Virginia reduced their number of delegates. He returned to the House of Burgesses and later served on the State's Executive Council.

Carter Braxton died of a stroke on October 10, 1797, at age 61. Braxton County, West Virginia, is named in his honor.

[*Please note that variations in birthdates for many of the Founders are due to calendar changes during this era involving a switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar.]

Thomas Jefferson
Born: April 13, 1743 – Shadwell (then Edge Hill), Virginia
Died: July 4, 1826 – Charlottesville, Virginia

As with Benjamin Franklin, whose reflections we offered in 2006, it is impossible within our page limitations to touch even briefly on all that Thomas Jefferson was and did. We can only highlight, after some perhaps less-known facts of his early life, some of this Founding Father's achievements, focusing mostly on his activities as a patriot and public servant. He was a lawyer, agronomist, musician, scientist, philosopher, author, architect, inventor, scholar and statesman, and was considered the foremost American son of the Enlightenment.

The man destined to be the third President of the United States was born April 13, 1743, in Shadwell, Virginia, the third of ten children of a wealthy planter and surveyor. When his father passed away in 1757, young Thomas inherited the huge estate where he ultimately built his beloved Monticello. His early schooling, which was local, included Latin, Greek and French. Following his father's death, he went to Gordonsville, to live with the family of the master of his new school, where he received a classical education and studied history and science. Jefferson went on to the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, graduating with highest honors in 1762. Next he enrolled in the philosophy school, studied mathematics, metaphysics, philosophy, and the writings of the British Empiricists, including Locke, Bacon and Newton (per Jefferson, the "three greatest men the world had ever produced."). He also continued French and Greek (he became fluent in five languages and could read two others) and read Tacitus and Homer. Ever the avid student, he was known to study up to 15 hours daily. Jefferson's ultimate formal education was civil and common law, which he studied under George Wythe, the first professor of law in America and a patriot who later would sign the Declaration of Independence—which his former student authored! He was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1767.

While practicing law and serving in the Virginia House of Burgesses, Jefferson wrote *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, a powerful argument of American terms for a rapprochement with Britain, intended to serve as instructions for the Virginia delegates to a national congress. It helped speed the way to independence and marked Jefferson as one of the most thoughtful patriot spokesmen. As a student, he had been present in that legislature when Patrick Henry read his five resolutions, ending with the famous words, "If this be treason, make the most of it!"

While supremely skilled in writing, Jefferson was not noted as a public speaker. In 1775 he was selected as an alternate delegate to the Continental Congress and subsequently attended. He took his seat the very same day Congress received notice of the fateful Battle of Bunker Hill. Jefferson, of course, went on to become the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, solicited by the Committee of Five, who thought him the best writer.

Back in Virginia in September 1776, Jefferson was elected to the new Virginia House of Delegates, where in three years he drafted 126 bills in his quest to reform and update Virginia's system of laws to reflect its new status as a democratic state. In 1778, his "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" led to several academic reforms at the College of William and Mary, including an elective system of study—the first in an American university. Another notable bill, enacted in 1786, was the one establishing religious freedom.

While Jefferson was Governor from 1779-1781, succeeding Patrick Henry, Virginia was twice invaded by the British, and he himself came very close to being captured. Four times in the spring of 1781 the Virginia Legislature had to adjourn and flee before the enemy. Monticello was captured. Overall, Jefferson's terms as Governor did not meet with public approval, with the people ever inclined to blame the administration for the misfortunes that befell them; however, in the end, when Jefferson had declined to seek a third term, a resolution passed in the legislature, without dissent, thanking him for his impartial, upright, and attentive discharge of his duty.

Jefferson was Minister to France from 1785 to 1789, succeeding Benjamin Franklin. While in general he supported the new Constitution, he thought the document flawed for lack of a Bill of Rights. He did not attend the Constitutional Convention.

From 1789-1793, Jefferson served as the first Secretary of State under President Washington. During this time, he came to be at odds with Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, in part because of his sympathy for the French Revolution and much due to the way the character of the executive office was being established. He viewed the office as too authoritarian and with too much potential to seize overwhelming power. He resigned from the cabinet in 1793 and formed the Democratic-Republican Party, opposing strong centralized government and championing the rights of states.

In 1796 Jefferson, a reluctant candidate to begin with, lost the presidency to John Adams, but amassed enough electoral votes to become Vice President (this strange circumstance, where political enemies could become President and Vice President was later changed by the 12th Amendment). Jefferson again ran for the Presidency in 1800, this time tying in the Electoral College with Aaron Burr. The House of Representatives settled the election—with Hamilton (who liked neither Jefferson nor Burr) supporting Jefferson. In 1801 Jefferson began his two terms as President of the United States. In his inaugural address he reminded all that a difference of opinion is not a difference of principle: "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it." A crowning achievement of his presidency was, of course, the Louisiana Purchase.

Later, in 1819, Jefferson founded the University of Virginia, something he had been planning for decades, it being the first university where higher education was completely separate from religious doctrine. In addition to its educational aspects, Jefferson is widely recognized for his architectural planning of the campus. In 1815 it was his extensive personal library that formed the nucleus for the Library of Congress. Shortly before his death he told his dearest and longest friend James Madison that he wished to be remembered for two things only: as the author of the Declaration of Independence and as the founder of the University of Virginia.

Jefferson's 1772 marriage to Martha Wayles Skelton produced six children. His wife died in 1782 and Jefferson never remarried.

Jefferson died, at age 83, on the Fourth of July, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration, and on the same date as John Adams, who died just a few hours later. Despite Jefferson's wealthy beginnings, he was deeply in debt when he died, barely solvent. He left his Monticello estate to the U.S. to be used as a school for orphans of navy officers.

Richard Henry Lee
Born: January 20, 1732 – Westmoreland County, Virginia
Died: June 19, 1794 – Chantilly, Virginia

Richard Henry Lee was the third son of Thomas Lee, and the seventh of eleven children. He was sent to England to attend Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Yorkshire. Upon returning to Virginia in 1751, he was elected leader of the militia group he formed in his neighborhood for the purpose of fighting in the French and Indian War. The militia, however, was turned away by the commanding general. While his family's wealth did not make it necessary for him to practice any profession, he studied and took up law.

He was appointed Justice of the Peace for Westmoreland County in 1757 and in 1761 was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he met Patrick Henry. In 1765 the Lee brothers, led by Richard, got together 115 men from Westmoreland County to sign the "Westmoreland Resolves," which Richard co-authored, threatening "danger and disgrace" to anyone who paid the hated stamp tax. This signing was one of the first deliberate acts of sedition against the British Crown and placed the signers and the State of Virginia in the leading vanguard of the coming revolution. An early advocate of independence from England, Richard Henry Lee was one of the first to create Committees of Correspondence to promote systematic interchange of information among the many independence-minded Americans in the various colonies. He was an outspoken critic of slavery.

In August 1774 he was chosen to be in the seven-man Virginia delegation to the first Continental Congress. Unlike his quieter brother Francis Lightfoot Lee, Richard was noted for his highly spirited speechmaking, and it was he who first offered the Resolutions for Independence to the Congress's Committee of the Whole in 1776 (in part reading "Resolved: 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."). His motion was seconded by John Adams. He served in Congress throughout the course of the War, concurrently while still serving in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Over a four-year period, he served on more than 100 committees in Congress. His work was so taxing that it affected his health, and several times he had to return to his home to recoup. After the Revolutionary War ended, he was recognized for the success he had had in funding public debt in Virginia, and in 1783 was selected as President of Congress (the sixth President of the United States in Congress assembled under the Articles of Confederation).

Richard Henry Lee was always a strong advocate of states' rights and opposed the federal constitution. Relenting, in 1789 he was elected the first senator from Virginia under the new federal government.

Mr. Lee was tall and graceful in person, and striking in feature. His voice was clear and rich and his oratory impressive. Lee was married twice, first to Anne Aylett, who died in 1768 and with whom he had four children, and then to Anne Pinckard, who gave him five children.

Richard Henry Lee died June 19, 1794, at age 62.

Francis Lightfoot Lee
Born: October 14, 1734 – Westmoreland County, Virginia
Died: January 11, 1797 – Richmond County, Virginia

Francis Lightfoot Lee was the fourth son of Thomas Lee, and, while his older brothers benefited from the advantage of going off to England for a formal grammar school education, Francis was taught at home by a tutor, under whom he developed an appreciation of reading, science and literature. While his birth order did not grant him the loftier education afforded his brothers, his father's wealth made it unnecessary for him to be concerned about studying a profession, and for a time in his youth he simply went about pursuing his scholarly interests and having a good time with his friends.

The spirit of patriotism was very strong in Francis Lee, and his brothers (one of whom was fellow signer Richard Henry Lee) actually considered him to be the keenest of all of them in political judgment. He was a close associate of Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, but his calm personality did not draw attention to himself and he remains one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence about whom relatively little is known. He singularly lacked ambition and never sought public office or prominence. He was characterized by his integrity, sound judgment, and his love of his country. He was also known for expressing a strong aversion to politics. Still, his judgment was widely respected and his opinion frequently sought.

As the saying goes, rather than seeking greatness, Francis Lee found it thrust upon him. And so Francis was the quiet one of the two Lees to earn a place in history as one of the United States' Founding Fathers. His valiancy lies in having always served when called upon to do so—and he served well.

He was elected annually to the Virginia House of Burgesses for ten terms, starting in 1765, where he demonstrated his strong resistance to the British after the Stamp Act was decreed. In 1775 he was sent to the Continental Congress, where despite his continuing rather reticent demeanor he managed to strike colleagues with his voting sense (often the opposite of his brother, Richard) and his privately expressed opinions. He was noted at times for providing balance to Richard's fiery and fractious orating.

Lee did not wed until age 35. He and his young bride then moved to the plantation in Richmond County where she had grown up. The Lees had no children, though they did bring up the daughters of his infirm brother William.

Francis Lightfoot Lee retired from Congress in 1779, but was not allowed to relish retirement long. He was elected yet again to the Virginia Legislature, and, however reluctantly, took his seat and fulfilled his obligations, though this time it was for a very short while.

Lee died January 11, 1797, at age 62. Leesburg, Virginia, was named in honor of the family.
