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FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS 2010[©]

Robert W. Smiley, Jr., Chairman

Once again, it is time to commemorate the continuing significance of the Fourth of July. This year we highlight the lives of four more outstanding patriots who signed the Declaration of Independence: Abraham Clark, Francis Hopkinson, John Morton and John Witherspoon, three from what became the State of Pennsylvania, one from New Jersey. Like their 40 compatriots memorialized in these sets of biographies over the past ten years, these men range from “larger than life” figures to those who are rather the same as many of us, ordinary people who benefit from a good education, become established in a field, marry and raise a family—only amidst these ordinary aspects of life they were faced with the challenge of helping to bring a new, free nation into existence. And they answered the call—with unbridled American Patriotism.

Today, of course, in our schools, knowledge of how our country was born is often meager. The majority of students when asked to identify Sam Adams would recognize the name only for the beer. Once upon a time, most anyone could tell you the origin of the phrase, “Put your ‘John Hancock’ right here.” Today, seemingly no one under 50 seems to know. Much of the American History taught in our schools at all levels is tainted with fiction, distortion and omission. Students emerge with little, if any, appreciation of the work, dedication, fervor, and great personal sacrifices that were requisite in establishing the United States of America. Unhappily, at the present time it appears that American Patriotism is waning. The idea of being a patriot is even ridiculed. But there is hope.

Economically, technologically, politically, culturally—in so many ways the efforts of patriotic Americans have produced enormous changes for the better in civilizations around the globe. We must remember that indisputable truth as we are told the opposite—as our ideals are apologized for and legislated and regulated away. As long as we keep our patriots’ flame alive, their accomplishments will endure. As long as we continue to live and advocate their truths, we can endure. We must not allow their ideals to be disparaged and besmirched. They forged around themselves a new and better world that has continued to benefit us. Let us all continue to do our part to bring their legacy to the forefront once again, out from behind the rising walls of apathy, neglect, denial and sabotage.

The rulers of colonial America were kings who mandated and enforced harsh and coercive laws. They resorted to violence to extort taxes and levies for England from America. The colonists resisted—with violence. We too must resist our harsh and coercive laws and taxes and levies—but *not* with the violence of our forefathers. Ours must be a nonviolent resistance that seeks to change minds and hearts as we express our conscience through our words and actions and as we vote for those who will safeguard this magnificent nation. Elmer Davis, one of the greatest news reporters of the mid-20th century said, “This Republic was not established by cowards, and cowards will not preserve it.”

Please enjoy the enclosed reflections on these four of our Founding Fathers, and, as you enjoy your Fourth of July Holiday 2010, 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://www.benefitcapital.com/4threflect.html>.

Abraham Clark

Born: February 15, 1726* – Elizabethtown, New Jersey

Died: September 15, 1794 – Elizabethtown, New Jersey

Abraham Clark was born in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, on February 15, 1726, the sole offspring of Thomas Clark, a farmer. Though brought up to work the farm, Abraham was of slight stature and had too weak a constitution for such strenuous labor. He received scant formal education; however, recognizing his son's natural aptitude for mathematics, his father hired a tutor to train him to be a surveyor. While working in that profession, Clark studied law on his own and eventually went into practice, though he probably never was actually admitted to the bar. He gained renown as "the poor man's counselor," having taken on title-dispute cases without monetary compensation—either swapping his work for goods or services from people unable to afford an attorney to defend them or working without charge altogether.

Clark's lifelong love of study and his generosity earned him high regard and enduring respect. His opinions were much sought by those with whom he came in contact and, simply because of his reputation, by people beyond his locale. Thoughtful and reasonable as he was, Clark did, however, comment critically on the pretensions of some lawyers, and that brought him some criticism in return.

Clark and Sarah Hatfield married in 1749. The ever-capable Sarah raised their ten children and managed the family farm, making it possible for Clark to pursue his public life. Clark championed the revolutionary cause from an early date. His first political position was appointment to the New Jersey Committee of Public Safety, where he served from 1774 to 1776, becoming its secretary during his tenure. Next, he was elected by the New Jersey Provincial Assembly to be a delegate to the Continental Congress, one of five men (the others were John Hart, Francis Hopkinson, Richard Stockton, and John Witherspoon) sent to replace the existing delegates from New Jersey, who were against the Colonies separating from England. Clark took his seat a mere few days before the fateful vote to declare independence. He enthusiastically affixed his signature while knowing full well the potential consequences to his person, family, and property. He remained active in Congress throughout the war, though plagued by health problems and always worried about his family and the safety of his home, which was near an area the British occupied.

Two of Clark's sons served as officers in the Continental Army during the War for Independence. Both young men were captured, tortured, beaten, and imprisoned on the notorious ship *Jersey*. Their father would not disclose this terrible mistreatment to Congress so as not to appear nepotistic until, however, he became aware of the most severe situation of one of them, an artillery captain, who was being starved—the only food he was getting was coming from prison-mates shoving it through a keyhole. Armed with this information, Congress took retaliatory action against a British officer, which in turn caused the British to ease up on Clark's son.

Clark was reelected to the Continental Congress each succeeding year, except for 1779, until 1783, and when the war ended he went back to his life in New Jersey and became a member of the state general assembly. In 1786 he was returned again to the Continental Congress, where he remained until 1788. In 1787 he was elected a member of the Constitutional Convention, but ill health kept him from attending the deliberations to frame the Constitution. His initial reservations about the Constitution put him in lesser standing in the New Jersey elections. He continued his objections until the Bill of Rights was added. He then regained his standing and was elected to the Second and Third

Congresses, retiring from public life upon Congress' adjournment in June 1794. His enjoyment of life back at home was brief, however. On September 15, 1794, at age 68, he died suddenly at home of sunstroke.

The marble slab where he is buried reads: "Firm and decided as a patriot, zealous and faithful as a friend to the public, he loved his country, and adhered to her cause in the darkest hours of her struggles against oppression."

Clark Township in Union County, New Jersey, is named for him, as is Abraham Clark High School in Roselle, New Jersey.

[*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.]

Francis Hopkinson
Born: October 2, 1737 – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Died: May 9, 1791 – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Francis Hopkinson was the son of Thomas Hopkinson, an emigrant from England and a well-regarded lawyer. The father became one of the first trustees of the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), which he chartered along with Benjamin Franklin. He had come in close association with Franklin through their similar thinking on philosophical subjects and in some scientific pursuits. The elder Hopkinson was also the first president of the American Philosophical Society, which grew out of the debating society Franklin had founded in 1745.

Following the death of her husband when her son was only 13, Francis' mother, helped by Franklin, put forth great effort and sacrificed considerably to afford the brilliant lad the advantages of a superior education. In 1757 Francis earned his bachelor's degree at the College of Philadelphia, of which he was the first student and a member of the first graduating class, and earned his master's degree three years later. After a period of law study under Benjamin Chew, he was admitted to the bar in 1761. That same year he served as secretary to a provincial council of the Pennsylvania Indian Commission that made a treaty with the Delaware and several Iroquois tribes. Shortly thereafter he assumed additionally the duties of customs collector for the port of New Castle, in Delaware. He subsequently moved to New Jersey, where he became a New Jersey Provincial Assemblyman.

Hopkinson is best known for his role as an ardent patriot during the American Revolution. In 1776 he resigned from his customs collection responsibilities and from his position in the Royal Provincial Council, specifically because those appointments conflicted with the revolutionary cause.

In 1776 New Jersey appointed him as a representative to the Second Continental Congress, just in time for him to vote for and sign the Declaration of Independence. He went on to serve on the committee that framed the Articles of Confederation, setting up an initial government for the newly independent nation in 1777. In November 1776 he had been elected to serve on the Navy Board, at Philadelphia.

During the War Hopkinson's family found themselves fleeing for their lives before an invading party of Hessians, who plundered and looted the property, including Francis's prized and renowned library of books. Later, after the British had been driven out of Philadelphia, a certain book that had been taken from his library was returned to him. The officer who had stolen it wrote on a blank page

an acknowledgment that he had done so and credited Hopkinson with obviously being a very well-educated man, however obstinate a rebel.

After the War Francis was an active advocate in speaking and in writing for the new Constitution. In 1787 he was an active member of the Constitutional Convention, and soon after the adoption of the Constitution Washington appointed Hopkinson Judge of the U.S. for the District of Pennsylvania, where he served from 1779 until his death.

Hopkinson is considered to be the man who designed the first American flag. While serving on the Continental Navy Board after his appointment in November 1776, he is said to have turned his attention to designing the flag for the United States. In 1780 he sought acknowledgment of this (along with the design of other ornaments and such that appeared on bills of exchange, ship papers, the seals of the boards of Admiralty and Treasury, and the Great Seal of the U.S.). While continuing to prevent Hopkinson from receiving any payment for such services (he had suggested payment might be “a Quarter Cask of the public wine”), his foes did not deny he had created the designs, and the journals of the Continental Congress clearly indicate that he did design the flag.

Hopkinson died suddenly of a stroke or epileptic seizure on May 9, 1791, at age 53, leaving his widow and five children, the eldest of which, Joseph, became a U.S. Congressman and a federal judge.

John Morton
Born: 1724 – Ridley Township, Pennsylvania**
Died: 1777 – Ridley Park, Pennsylvania

John Morton is one of those signers of the Declaration of Independence about whom rather little information survives. His birth and death years are most consistently reported as 1724 and 1777, respectively, without month or date, except for one record giving the date of his expiring as April 1. He was the grandson of one of the very first Swedish people to emigrate from Sweden to the “New World,” though his ancestry another generation back was Finnish. His father, a surveyor, passed away before he was born, and he was taken under the wing of his English stepfather, John Sketchley.

Morton received scant formal education, and he was trained to be a surveyor, like his stepfather. He pursued that profession for a number of years and learned farming as well. He married Ann Justice while in his twenties, and they had either eight or nine children. Most reports say there were three sons and five daughters.

He was seated in the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly, serving during the period from 1756 to 1775, becoming its president in 1775. He also served Pennsylvania as a Justice of the Peace, from 1764, and as such was made a delegate to the General Assembly of Pennsylvania. He served with distinction for many years and was for a period the speaker of its house of representatives. His public service had risen to the national level when he represented Pennsylvania in the Stamp Act Congress in 1765.

In 1766, during a brief period when he had lost his seat in the Provincial Assembly, he was appointed High Sheriff of his county, serving for three years, and sometime after that he was appointed to the Superior Court of Pennsylvania. He served as Presiding Judge of the General Court and the Court of Common Pleas. In 1774, he became Associate Judge of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and the same year was elected to the Continental Congress, where he chaired the Committee of the

Whole, which reported the Articles of Confederation, which were not ratified, however, until after he had died.

At first, Morton was opposed to independence, fearing so much the war that he foresaw would happen. But the unyielding British intransigence as 1776 got underway convinced him to back the Colonies' movement for independence. His support was crucial, and as a treasonous act, it was indeed dangerous for him. Pennsylvania, along with Delaware, started out opposed to the Declaration, and, had they failed to turn about, the Declaration could have failed to pass. At the time of the final vote at the Second Continental Congress, Morton's Pennsylvania delegation was seriously split about independence. He is said to have arrived late for the meeting, after everyone else had voted, and it was his vote that was the deciding one for his delegation, breaking the deadlock, when two of their delegates were purposefully absent. Fortunately for the cause of independence, the assemblage still allowed him to vote. And so he went down in history as one of the nine signers of the Declaration from Pennsylvania.

John Morton was the very first of the signers to die, succumbing to "an inflammatory fever" in the year after the Declaration's adoption, in his 52nd or 53rd year.

[**Mr. Morton apparently did not know his true date of birth.]

John Witherspoon
Born: February 5, 1723* – Gifford, East Lothian, Scotland
Died: November 15, 1794 – Princeton, New Jersey

John Witherspoon was born near Edinburgh, Scotland, son of a parish minister. Young Witherspoon received his early education at Haddington Grammar School, going on to the University of Edinburgh, where he earned a Master of Arts. This was followed by four years of divinity school, and later he was awarded a Doctorate of Divinity from the University of St. Andrews. He began preaching at age 21.

In 1766 he was elected to the presidency of the small (Presbyterian) College of New Jersey (this institution later became Princeton University). Witherspoon's family successfully pressured him to initially refuse the post, as it meant emigrating to America. In August 1768, Witherspoon finally did emigrate to America with Elizabeth Montgomery Witherspoon and the surviving five of their ten children, along with 300 valuable books from his library. That very month he was inaugurated the sixth president of the college. The privately funded college had been in financial difficulty, but under Witherspoon's presidency, its fortunes changed much for the better. His reputation for literary brilliance attracted students from all around the country. Witherspoon saw to the improvement of instruction in all departments of the college, and during his long tenure there graduated many men who went on to become most influential in the new nation. The limited-government philosophy of most of these is attributed substantially to Witherspoon's influence. As to Witherspoon's legacy at Princeton, from among his students came 37 judges, three of whom made it to the U.S. Supreme Court; 10 Cabinet officers; 12 members of the Continental Congress; 28 U.S. Senators; and 49 United States Congressmen. One student, Aaron Burr, became Vice President, and another, James Madison, became President.

The War for Independence precipitated the physical destruction of much of the college, which was evacuated of students and faculty early on. Troops on both sides were quartered in Nassau Hall,

and buildings, including the library, were plundered and devastated, the worst damage occurring during the Battle of Princeton on January 3, 1777.

Now a committed American, Witherspoon fervently took up the revolutionary cause. John Adams, stopping over in Princeton in 1774 on his way to the Continental Congress' initial meeting, proclaimed the Scotland-born Witherspoon "as high a son of liberty as any man in America." He became one of the most influential members of the Continental Congress, where he began his first term in June 1776, serving initially on the Committee of Correspondence and Safety. He was prominent in the deliberations about a declaration of independence, and when someone who opposed the measure said that the country was not yet ripe for such a declaration, Witherspoon countered, "Sir, in my judgment the country is not only ripe, but rotting."

He became the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence, affixing his signature on July 2, 1776. It was five months after he signed the Declaration that the British burned his library. In Congress, he served on over 100 committees, most notably those having to do with war and foreign affairs. He spoke often and eloquently in debate, and, in these times when such were usually read, most of his speeches (and sermons) were delivered entirely from memory.

Witherspoon retired from Congress at the end of 1779, but was persuaded to come back in 1780. He was almost never absent from the sessions, ever placing his attention to his official duties ahead of his personal considerations. During the war he experienced the loss of his son James, who had graduated in 1770 from the college he'd headed. As the United States went on to win independence, Witherspoon assisted in the drafting of the peace agreement that brought the war to an end. He helped draft the Articles of Confederation and organize the executive departments of the new government. He played a major role in shaping foreign and monetary policy, and drew up instructions for the peace commissions. He went on to serve twice in the New Jersey Legislature, a strongly supporting member of the ratifying convention that brought New Jersey the honor of being the third state to ratify the Constitution of the United States.

His wife Elizabeth died on October 8, 1789. He later remarried Ann Dill and together they had two daughters before he died.

A series of eye injuries led to total blindness for Witherspoon by 1792. In 1794 he died on his farm near Princeton at age 71 and is buried in the Princeton Cemetery.

A famous quote from this patriot: "Never read a book through merely because you have begun it."

[*His birth year is given as 1723 or 1722, but most frequently as 1723.]
