

# BENEFIT CAPITAL COMPANIES INC.

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## FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS 2011<sup>©</sup>

**Robert W. Smiley, Jr., Chairman**

With the early days of summer 2011 underway, it is once again 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 and risked their lives, the safety of their families, and their fortunes and livelihoods to bring our exceptional nation into being: Thomas McKean of Pennsylvania, Benjamin Harrison V of Virginia, and George Read and Caesar Rodney of Delaware. One of these magnificent patriots was the final signer of the Declaration and later became the second President of the United States in Congress Assembled. Another cast the vote that broke the deadlock in his state's vote for independence. One was the delegate to the Continental Congress who reported the resolution for independence to the assembly and was selected to read Jefferson's draft of the Declaration to them. The fourth is one of the two men who signed all three papers that form the basis of our country's history: the original Petition to the King, the Declaration, and the Constitution.

We are now just two years away from the completion of this 14-year series of annual biographical sketches and 235 years beyond the historic date of the Declaration's adoption. The more years that pass, the greater the distance, it seems, that has grown between the hearts of Americans and an appreciation for the wisdom, courage, hard struggles, and sacrifices of those who played key roles in bringing our unique representative republic into being. A survey conducted by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni reported a distressing lack of basic knowledge of American history by many college seniors, with professors surveyed believing that 81 percent of them were far below average in American History and not even familiar with main concepts from the U.S. Constitution. Few were seen as understanding current history, much less past history.

Freedom is not free and the preservation of our unique form of government requires constant care, concern and vigilance on the part of our citizens. We are confronted with an ever growing population of "gimme" mentality people who behave as if what for so many years their forebears earned by hard work and ingenuity now should be free to them. This group has little, if any, appreciation of who pays for it. It was Abraham Lincoln who warned: "Our safety, our liberty, depends upon preserving the Constitution of the United States as our fathers made it inviolate. The people of the United States are the rightful masters of both Congress and the Courts, not to overthrow the Constitution, but to overthrow the men who would pervert the Constitution."

Please enjoy the enclosed reflections on these four of our Founding Fathers, and, as you enjoy your Independence Day holiday 2011, remember and honor them with gratitude, and continue to cherish and preserve the magnificent government they and the Constitution framers gave us. To quote a famous American general, "No man is entitled to the blessings of freedom unless he be vigilant in its preservation."

Please enjoy as well our prior years' Fourth of July Reflections, which are now featured on our website: <http://benefitcapital.com/4threflect.html>

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**Benjamin Harrison V**  
**Born: April 5, 1726\* – Berkeley Plantation, Virginia**  
**Died: April 24, 1791 – Berkeley Plantation, Virginia**

On April 5, 1726, Benjamin Harrison IV and Ann Carter Harrison welcomed the first of their ten children, a son: Benjamin Harrison V. Young Benjamin became acquainted with Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry while attending William & Mary College in Williamsburg. His formal education concluded upon the tragic deaths of his father and two of his sisters, who were struck by lightning in the summer of 1745. He went back home to assume, young as he was, management of the family estate and businesses, including shipbuilding and horse-breeding.

In 1748, Benjamin married a niece of Martha Washington, Elizabeth Basset. Interestingly, Benjamin himself was a cousin to George Washington, with whom he became close friends. The Harrisons became parents to William Henry Harrison, ninth president of the United States and great-grandparents to the 23<sup>rd</sup> president, Benjamin Harrison.

Benjamin first entered public life when elected a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1749. His service there, on and off as speaker, continued until that assembly was dissolved in 1774. He was chosen in 1773 for the committee of correspondence that united the colonies against Britain.

Harrison was next elected a delegate to the First Continental Congress, where he began his initial term (he was re-elected four times) the very first day Congress convened in September 1774. In Congress, he served as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House. In 1776, it was Harrison who was selected to read Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence to the assembled delegates on July 1.

Also while in Congress, as part of the Marine and War and Ordinances Committees, Harrison collaborated with General Washington in planning the American Army. He served as a lieutenant in the county militia during the War for Independence. And in 1780, as the war raged, traitor Benedict Arnold, with his British invasion forces, stormed ashore from the James River and began destroying homes in the area. When his troops got to Harrison's Berkeley Plantation, Arnold had the family's ancestral portraits burned in a bonfire.

Late in 1777, Harrison had resigned from Congress and returned home, entering the lower house of the Virginia legislature, where he was speaker several times during his service for the period 1777 to 1791. This service was interrupted by four distinguished years as Governor of the State of Virginia; he was elected in 1781 and served until 1784, when he rejoined the legislature. Also during this period, as a member of the Virginia Ratification Convention in 1788 he was instrumental in shaping the new United States Constitution when he argued strenuously for a Bill of Rights prior to ratification. The attempt failed, but he helped secure Virginia's ratification in a close vote, and he was a member of the committee that recommended rights to be included in what did become the Bill of Rights.

Benjamin Harrison died April 24, 1791, at age 65, of gout. Harrison County, West Virginia, is named in his honor.

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\*[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.]

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**Thomas McKean**  
**Born: March 19, 1734 – New London Township, Pennsylvania**  
**Died: June 24, 1817 – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

The man who was to become the final signer of the Declaration of Independence and the second President of the United States in Congress Assembled was born on March 19, 1734, to William McKean, a New London tavern keeper, and Letitia Finney, both of whom had emigrated from Ireland in their childhood.

As was the case with fellow Declaration signers George Read and James Smith, McKean's early education was at the academy of the esteemed Rev. Dr. Francis Alison in New London. He began the study of law at age 16 and was admitted to the Delaware Bar at the young age of 20.

At 21, McKean's initial foray into politics began with his commissioning as Deputy Attorney General for Sussex County. In 1756, he was admitted to practice in the courts of the city and county of Philadelphia, and the very next year found him admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. Thus he entered into his long years of service to both Delaware and Pennsylvania. He became the clerk of the Delaware Assembly in 1757, but resigned in 1758 to go to London to study law at Middle Temple. After his return from England, in 1762 he was elected to the Delaware Assembly, or the General Assembly of the Lower Counties of Newcastle, Kent and Sussex. He was repeatedly reelected for 17 years, even though for the final six of those years he made his home in Pennsylvania. He married Mary Borden in 1763.

In 1774, he was elected to the First Continental Congress. He was distinguished as the only member of Congress to serve in Congress from its opening in 1774 until the Treaty of Paris in 1783. As the surge to declare independence from Great Britain grew, it was McKean who summoned Caesar Rodney to break the deadlock in the Delaware's vote for independence. Two of the three-man delegation were present: McKean for, Read as yet opposed. Unanimity was required. It was McKean who summoned the ailing Caesar Rodney to hasten in what became a courageous 80-mile overnight ride to arrive in Philadelphia just in time to seal that majority vote.

McKean holds the distinction of having been the last of the signers to put his pen to the Declaration. Not long after voting for independence, he had departed to take charge of a battalion to assist General Washington at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and therefore was not present on August 2, when most of the others affixed their signatures. The exact date of McKean's signing is not known, only that it was sometime after mid-January 1777. Then a printer's error left his name off the copy published in the Journal of The Continental Congress.

Whereas it was common for delegates to Congress to be active in state capacities at the same time as they served in Congress, McKean probably holds the record, as he figured very prominently in two states—Delaware and Pennsylvania. Indeed, he is the only signer who was the chief executive and concurrent officeholder in two states.

As the Revolutionary War waged on into the 1780s, McKean, like many of the signers, faced personal peril. While acting in double capacity of President of Delaware and Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, he wrote his dear friend John Adams how he was "hunted like a fox by the enemy, compelled to remove my family five times in three months, and at last fixed them in a little log-house

on the banks of the Susquehanna, but they were soon obliged to move again on account of the incursions of the Indians.”

McKean served on the national council through the Revolutionary War. He went on to serve on the committee to draw up the Articles of Confederation. In 1781, he was elected second President of the United States in Congress Assembled. Though he was the second in this position, in office from July 10 to November 5, he became the first elected under those ratified Articles of Confederation. In 1787, he spearheaded Pennsylvania’s ratification of the United States Constitution. Not finished with public service, McKean became Governor of Pennsylvania. Though he served in a period of severe partisan dissension, he was a popular Governor and served nine years—from 1799 to 1808.

Thomas McKean passed away on June 24, 1817, at age 83.

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## **George Read**

**Born: September 18, 1733 – North East, Maryland**

**Died: September 21, 1798 – New Castle, Delaware**

George Read entered the world in North East, Maryland, September 18, 1733, the first of six sons born to Irish immigrant Colonel John Read, a prosperous planter. Soon after George’s birth, the family relocated to New Castle, Delaware.

At 17, Read began the study of law in Philadelphia under an attorney who was so assured of his abilities that even while Read was still in law studies he assigned a good number of his cases to him. Read turned his two shares of his father’s estate over to his brothers, expressing the belief that the education he had received was his proper share. He was admitted to the bar in 1753, when only 19, and the following year began his very successful law practice in New Castle.

Read led Delaware’s protestation against the infamous Stamp Act and cautioned the British Government of the consequences he predicted the Crown faced if they persisted in taxing the colonies without giving them direct representation in Parliament: independence of the colonies and having those colonies surpassing England as an industrial power. Seeing no change in the Crown’s position coming, Read resigned as attorney general and accepted a seat in the First Congress meeting in Philadelphia in 1774. He was reelected annually throughout the Revolutionary War and was almost continually in attendance. He was briefly acting Governor of Delaware, in 1777.

Read continued to hope for reconciliation with England, however, and on July 2, 1776, feeling the action too precipitous, actually voted against the first motion for American independence. He was the only one of the signers to have done so. While he was in favor of independence, he worried that his small state would be breaking free from the tyranny of far-off England only to become dominated by the larger states. But sign the Declaration he ultimately did—the only signer who signed it twice, as fellow-Delawarean John Dickinson was ailing and Read was authorized to sign on his behalf. Independence now officially declared, Read took up the revolutionary cause whole-heartedly and was its steadfast, vigorous proponent.

Read and his family suffered greatly as a result of his supporting the revolutionary cause. The British confiscated his home, and his courageous wife Gertrude, also a fervent patriot, along with their children, were often in danger as the British continued to threaten. Gertrude was even taken captive, and for six years Read was forced to flee from one place to another in order to avoid capture. Ill health

caused him to give up official duties during 1779, but, once again well, he was appointed judge in the Court of Appeals in admiralty cases.

Independence achieved, in 1787 Read became a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and became one of the framers of the Constitution of the United States. He opposed simply amending the Articles of Confederation and championed an altogether new constitution. Under Read's leadership, Delaware became the first state to ratify the Constitution. Under that newly created Government, he then became a member of the U.S. Senate, where he served for two terms. As a Federalist, he was always working to guarantee the smaller states the same rights as the larger ones—until 1798, when he took on the position of chief justice of the Delaware Supreme Court. There his great knowledge of the law and his honesty, wisdom, calm demeanor and patience earned him enduring respect.

Indeed, Read is considered by some the father of the State of Delaware, whose first constitution he authored, in 1776. He is also distinguished as one of two men who signed all of the three papers that form the basis of our Country's history: the original Petition to the King, the Declaration and the Constitution.

Read died on September 21, 1798, just three days after having turned 65.

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## **Caesar Rodney**

**\*Born: October 7, 1728 – Dover, Delaware**

**\*Died: June 26, 1784 – Dover, Delaware**

Caesar Rodney was born October 7, 1728, in Dover, Delaware, the oldest and longest-lived offspring of a father of the same name, a well-to-do farmer descended from illustrious European forebears. Like many boys growing up on family farms, young Caesar's early education took place at home. He later attended Philadelphia's Latin School. When his father died in 1745, the 800-acre estate passed to 17-year-old Caesar, who ran the farm for ten years. Following his mother's death in 1763, he became responsible for providing for his younger siblings.

The high esteem in which Rodney's community held him led to his entry into politics in 1755, with his commissioning as High Sheriff of Kent County. He was elected to Delaware's Colonial Assembly three years later. He served for 12 years and was its speaker in 1769, and from 1773 through 1776. Concurrently, Rodney next became a delegate to the Stamp Act Congress in 1765. While the infamous act was repealed, the British introduced yet more onerous measures.

Rodney was first seated in the Continental Congress in September 1774 and was assigned to several important committees. He served in Congress from 1774 through 1776, along with fellow Delaware delegates Thomas McKean and George Read. Now came the time when his role as a member of the three-man delegation became crucial to the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Congress had mandated there must be unanimous approval by all 13 of the colonial delegations. That lacking, independence would not have been declared and the colonies would have had to work out some kind of reconciliation with England. Each delegation was to cast one vote for their colony, reflecting the majority of their number. As the vote neared, Delaware's Thomas McKean was in favor of independence; George Read was not. Rodney was not in Congress, having gone home to cope with persisting loyalist problems in the county. And he was not well. The skin cancer that had been vexing him for some years had spread and was affecting his general health, as was his asthma. Yet, upon receiving word from McKean that the colonies' Declaration of Independence was hanging in

the balance unless he broke the tie, Rodney rode 80 miles the night of July 1, through a thunderstorm, with roads rendered mushy by mud, and across engorged streams, to arrive in Philadelphia just as voting was starting on July 2. He cast his vote for independence, and Delaware became the first state to approve it. He signed the Declaration on August 2. Among the signers, he was one of only three bachelors.

In autumn 1776, Delaware called a convention both to frame a new constitution and to appoint delegates to the next Continental Congress. Due to majority opposition—the loyalist problem again—Rodney was removed from the Delaware General Assembly and was not reappointed to Congress. He continued a member of the Council of Safety and the Committee of Inspection and worked diligently in both offices. Very importantly, as a member of the Council of Safety, he was vastly instrumental in the war effort. Throughout the revolutionary conflict, he persevered by all means to secure funding, equipment, and troops to fuel the Continental Army, even when the disastrous Battle of Camden left the Delaware regiment so destroyed it had to join with a Maryland regiment from then on.

Rodney was returned to Congress in December 1777. Around the same time, he was elected president of Delaware, which position he held for about four years, serving seven months beyond his full term before resigning, declining reelection in 1782, influenced partly by his deteriorating health. Rodney saw his colony through the war at the cost of personal neglect, as he never got proper treatment.

In 1782 and 1783, the Delaware General Assembly elected him to the U.S. Congress under the Articles of Confederation, but his health prevented his attending. He was elected to the 1782/83 session of Delaware's Legislative Council and named speaker. The Council even met in his home briefly, but his health was now failing fast, and he died on June 26, 1784, at age 55, before the session ended.

Caesar Rodney never married. Some feel it was because of the relentless cancerous growth ravaging his face and then his whole body. He was known to wear a green silk scarf to conceal the deformity.

In 1999, the back of the first of the fifty state quarters issued by the U.S. Treasury commemorated Rodney's 80-mile midnight ride to Philadelphia.

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[\*Various references disagree on dates.]

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