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## FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS 2004©

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

To commemorate the enduring significance of the Fourth of July, here are four more reflections about the lives of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence. They 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. They, along with the other 52 signers, put their country ahead of their own interests, fortunes, and often their own personal safety.

They knew very well what they were doing when they affixed their signatures to that fateful document. They believed that a unique new freedom for the American people required standing up for their convictions, that it would be worth their sacrifices, and they succeeded in achieving it. Let us not slip into carelessness and complacency about preserving it, and let us not forget these patriots, but honor them and all who to this day have stood between us and tyranny.

As the 228th anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence nears, it is time more than ever to revisit the reality that freedom is not free. American history, as now taught in so many of our schools, has come to ignore and distort the events and qualities that made America great. We are losing our unifying sense of patriotism and our heartfelt appreciation for the sacrifices of heroes sung and unsung. These patriots, from then to now, gave up much of their lives—and many their lives themselves—to earn and preserve the freedom that provides our cherished American way of life.

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.

May you continue to enjoy the liberty that these men helped to provide!


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**FOURTH OF JULY REFLECTIONS**
**JULY 4, 2004**
**INDEPENDENCE DAY**

# Lewis Morris

**Born: April 8, 1726 - Morrisania, New York**
**Died: January 22, 1798**

Lewis Morris is another of the signers of the Declaration of Independence who was born into wealth and continued as a man of means—until the time that he risked all and lost so much because of his devotion to the cause of liberty.

At the age of 36 he inherited the great estate Morrisania in Westchester County, New York, where he had been born and which he had helped his father manage and farm following his graduation from Yale in 1746. Tall, handsome, graceful and of benevolent demeanor, he married young, and he and his wife welcomed into the world ten children—six sons and four daughters. Morris was devoted to his family and his home, an altogether content man who one might not have expected to put all his personal and financial capital on the line for a cause that was not even all that popular initially among New York colonists.

Incensed by the British determination to tax the colonies without representation, he became very vocal, and took an active part in politics. When there was now no doubt that only an armed conflict could free the colonies from British domination and tyranny, Morris was elected to the Second Congress. There he served on General Washington's committee to come up with the ways and means to supply the colonies with ammunition and military stores. He also helped persuade the Indians in the then wild western country around Pittsburgh to take up the colonists' cause and unalign themselves from Britain.

Morris resumed his Congressional seat early in the fateful year of 1776, serving on several important committees that organized the support that provided arms and ammunition to the troops. In June he was appointed a general in command of the Westchester County militia. When he returned to New York, he had to face a prevalent attitude among New Yorkers against independence. Over the years, the New Yorkers had formed a very cordial relationship with the British soldiers and were simply reluctant to turn on them. Morris worked tirelessly to convert his fellow New Yorkers' heads and hearts, meeting with some success by the time he returned to Congress. There, as June turned into July, he remained at his post in Philadelphia, despite being fully aware that his home and everything he owned was almost certain to be lost in attack from the British Army. The British army had landed near his estate, and their armed ships were within cannon shot distance of his home. Morris, standing his post in Philadelphia, is said to have shouted, "Damn the consequences, give me the pen!" as he boldly signed the Declaration. More than a thousand acres of his estate were left in burned ruins, his livestock and tenants driven away. Worst of all, his family was forced into exile. It is said that few men during the revolution were called to make greater sacrifices than Morris and that none made them more cheerfully, and with more resolve.

Independence secured, Morris served the state of New York in a number of ways, often as a member of the state legislature, and as a major general of the militia. His beloved Morrisania restored, he finished out his long life there in contentment, where he died in 1798, at 71 years of age.

# Stephen Hopkins

**Born: March 7, 1707 - Scituate, Rhode Island**
**Died: July 13, 1785**

Stephen Hopkins was brought up to be a farmer and had little formal education. Self-educated, he was an avid reader of Greek, Roman and British history, and enjoyed English poetry. He excelled in penmanship, mathematics, and surveying. He tried diligently to be a farmer, but politics were to be his future. He married Sarah Scott when only 19, and they had seven children. Sixteen years later, he sold the family farm and moved to Providence, where he became a successful merchant and ship builder.

Hopkins started his political career when he was elected town clerk, then appointed a justice of the peace, and later became chief justice of the court of common pleas. In 1754, Hopkins was appointed a commissioner from Rhode Island to the Albany convention, the purpose of which was to develop a plan of uniting the colonies and arranging an alliance with the Indians, in view of the impending war with France. In 1756 he was elected Governor and in 1764, while in that office, he had a disagreement with the prime minister of England, William Pitt, regarding illegal imports with the French colonies.

Hopkins was one of the earliest and most vigorous champions of colonial rights. He spoke out against British tyranny long before the revolutionary period. In 1765, Hopkins wrote a treatise entitled "The Grievances of the American Colonies Candidly Examined," which was printed by the order of the general assembly and subsequently reprinted in London. This document exposed the injustices of the Stamp Act, as well as other acts of the British Government. He drafted the resolutions Providence adopted, which were nearly identical to those Patrick Henry introduced in the Virginia House of Burgesses.

In 1772, Hopkins was again elected to the general assembly and attended the first Continental Congress in 1774. Meanwhile, Hopkins freed his slaves, and the following year, he sponsored a bill that prohibited the importation of slaves into the colony. In 1776, Hopkins had the honor of signing his name to the Declaration, which declared the colonies to be free and sovereign independent states. His signature was noteworthy due to a condition of paralytic palsy in his right hand, the only signature to the Declaration visibly written with a trembling and unsteady hand, but with a fully resolved heart and mind. During the war he continued as a bold orator, and he was an active member of the naval committee that governed the Revolutionary War.

Hopkins spent the remainder of his life doing local public service and charitable work. Among many accomplishments, he helped found the Providence Town Library. He was a skilled legislator, a righteous judge, an able representative, and a brilliant and upright governor. He died at his home in Providence at the age of 78. He was honored in his journey to his final resting place by a great procession of people from all walks of life, people whose respect and affection he had earned over his long life.

# William Floyd

**Born: December 17, 1734 - Brookhaven, Long Island, New York**
**Died: August 4, 1821**

William Floyd was descended from a long line of Welsh farmers, and while in his teens was left heir to a substantial estate affording him the entree to acquaint himself with prominent, distinguished and educated individuals. His wealth enabled him to practice a generous hospitality. As a demonstrated and true friend to the people, he was appointed as a delegate from New York to the first Continental Congress in 1774. In this capacity, Floyd assisted in dissolving the political bonds that had tied the colonies to the British government, providing indispensable service to the patriotic cause. He was tireless in his efforts to effect the lifting of the British yoke from the colonists' shoulders. Floyd's opinions were the result of reason and reflections, and he was viewed as a man with great integrity and independence, his motives rarely questioned.

Floyd was married twice. His first wife, Hannah Jones, died in 1781, and he subsequently married Joanna Strong. His two marriages produced five children, and one of his daughters was once engaged to James Madison.

While Floyd was in Philadelphia, Long Island was taken possession of by the British troops, and his family had to flee for safety to Connecticut while his home was occupied by a company of horsemen and used as a place of rendezvous until it was destroyed in the Revolutionary War. For seven years, Floyd and his family were refugees from their home and farm, and Floyd had nothing but his meager pay as a delegate in Congress to support himself and his family.

From 1777 to 1783, Floyd was appointed a senator for the state of New York, since the district he represented was entirely behind enemy lines, making it impossible for elections to be held. In 1789 he was elected to congress under the new constitution, and assisted in organizing the government. General Floyd maintained a distinguished rank and was often called upon to preside over the deliberations of the national assembly.

Unlike some of his fellow Declaration signers, Floyd was not known as a speaker or writer, but he continued throughout his life to garner respect as someone who worked hard and knew what he was talking about when he gave advice. An early supporter of Thomas Jefferson, he was chosen a presidential elector in the elections of 1792, 1800, and again in 1804.

At the end of the war, he returned to his native state of New York, and in 1784 bought a large tract of uninhabited land that he could farm. After many long years, in 1803, when the land was fully developed, Floyd moved his family and made his home there. He resided there until his death in 1821 at the age of 86 years.

# Philip Livingston

**Born: January 15, 1716 - Albany, New York**
**Died: June 12, 1778**

Philip Livingston was born to wealth. After graduating from Yale, and while still a young man, he established himself in the mercantile business in the city of New York. It was not until the age of 40 that he entered into politics--as a member of the city's board of alderman, a position that would eventually catapult him to the provincial assembly and to represent the colony at the Stamp Act Congress. Later he helped found King's College, which is now Columbia University. For his entire life, he continued to be successful and innovative.

In 1774, Livingston was elected to represent New York in Congress. There he served on a number of committees where his usefulness was particularly valued in committees having to do with commercial subjects. While Livingston wrote and spoke against British oppression, he and his family were willing to submit to the authority of the mother country. The colony of New York had been for a time more under the influence of the British crown than several other colonies. And so, even with the formal break with the mother country just around the corner, not all the Livingston family (a brother and two cousins also were serving in Congress) had abandoned the notion of reconciliation with Britain. But when the British ministers began to reveal a disposition of oppression toward the colonies, Livingston's personal sentiments shifted, displaying patriotic feelings, and he was ready to rise in opposition to British aggressions. The New York colony, aided by Livingston, adopted measures that hastened forward the revolution. In 1776, Livingston cast his vote in favor of the Declaration. Once the vote of independence was in, with Philip's signature boldly affixed to the Declaration, the family whole-heartedly accepted his decision, and became dedicated American patriots.

In May 1777 Livingston was chosen a senator for the southern district of the first legislature of the State of New York. That October, he was reelected to Congress. This was a critical and dismal period in the history of the Revolution. Sadly, he did not live to see the blossom of freedom he had help to plant, and had nurtured so fervently, grow to full bloom. The British had taken Philadelphia, requiring Congress to hold their sessions in York, Pennsylvania, and the ultimate outcome of the war was not certain as the end of Livingston's days on earth neared. Despite seriously failing health, with doctors giving him no hope of recovery, his patriotic spirit was so strong that he persisted in attending sessions of Congress.

His family at this time was in Kingston, where they had been obliged to flee to escape the British army. Rapidly losing his life to congestive heart failure, he still felt Congress required his presence. With that patriotic spirit so vital, and his love of country so strong and undiminished, he persisted in attending. While in attendance, he died suddenly in June of 1778 at the age of 62 in York, Pennsylvania.