

What Price Freedom **by Paul Harvey**

The question often has been asked, “What happened to those men who signed the Declaration of Independence?” Paul Harvey, noted radio commentator and writer, answered the question in an article entitled, “What Price Freedom?” Here’s what he found:

“Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the Revolutionary Army. One of the signers had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died of wounds or the hardships of the Revolutionary War.

But what kind of men were they, these men who boldly wrote their names to the Declaration that lit the fires of liberty in souls of men throughout the world?

Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists, eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well-educated.

Their security, their incomes, and their worldly possessions made them substantially well off. But they signed the Declaration of Independence even though they knew the penalty would be death on the gallows, if they were captured.

They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes...and their sacred honor. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and his properties to pay his debts and died in rags. Thomas McKean was so hounded by the enemy that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him and poverty was his reward.

Vandals or soldiers or both looted the properties of Ellery Clymer, Hall, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge and Middleton. At the Battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. The owner quietly urged General George Washington to open fire, which was done. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt. His grave is unmarked and unknown.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months. John Hart was driven from his wife’s bedside as she was dying. Their thirteen children fled for their lives. His fields and his grist mill were laid waste. For more than a year he lived in the forests and caves, returning home after the war to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart.

Morris and Livingston suffered similar fates. Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild-eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. These were soft-spoken men of means, wealth and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. Standing tall, straight and unwavering, they pledged: ‘For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.’”