

Savannah Congress Coaster Set #6 – Signers



Declaration of Independence - What happened to the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence? Five signers were captured by the British, tortured as traitors before they died. Twelve had their homes burned. Two lost sons in the revolutionary army, another had two of his sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the revolutionary war.

What kind of men were they? Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners, men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

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 properties to pay his debts, and died a pauper. Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British he was forced to move his family constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and kept his family in hiding. All possessions were taken from him, and his reward was also poverty. Tories 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, his home, for British headquarters. The owner quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The British jailed his wife, and she died within a few months. John Hart lived in forests and caves for a year after he and his 13 children fled for their lives. His fields were destroyed, along with his gristmill to waste. He returned home to find his wife dead and his children vanished. Only a few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates.



Button Gwinnett - He started his career as a merchant in England. In 1762 he emigrated to America. Never very successful, he moved to Savannah in 1765 and opened a store. When that venture failed, he bought St. Catherine's Island, off the coast of Georgia, to the south of Savannah, and attempted to become a planter. Though his planting activities were also unsuccessful, he did make a name for himself in local politics. Gwinnett did not become a strong advocate of colonial rights until 1775, when St. John's Parish, which encompassed his lands, threatened to secede from Georgia due to the colony's rather conservative response to the events of the times. During his tenure in the Assembly, Gwinnett's chief rival was Lachlan McIntosh, and Lyman Hall was his closest ally. Gwinnett's rivalry with McIntosh began when McIntosh was appointed as brigadier general of the 1st Regiment of the Georgia Continentals in 1776.

Gwinnett served in the Georgia state legislature, and wrote the original draft of Georgia's first State Constitution. As Speaker of the Georgia Assembly, at the death of the President of Georgia, Archibald Bulloch, Gwinnett became acting President of the Congress and commander-in-chief of Georgia's military. In this position, he sought to undermine the leadership of McIntosh. Tensions between Gwinnett and McIntosh reached a boiling point when the General Assembly

approved Gwinnett's attack on British Florida in April 1777.

Gwinnett had McIntosh's brother arrested and charged with treason. He ordered McIntosh to lead the invasion of British-controlled East Florida, which failed. Gwinnett and McIntosh blamed each other for the defeat, and McIntosh publicly called Gwinnett "a scoundrel and lying rascal". Gwinnett challenged McIntosh to a duel, which they fought on May 16, 1777, at a plantation owned by deposed Royal Governor James Wright. The two men exchanged pistol shots at twelve paces, and both were wounded. Gwinnett died of his wounds three days later, and he was later buried in Savannah's Colonial Park Cemetery. McIntosh, although wounded, quickly recovered and was never convicted Gwinnett's death.

Lyman Hall - Physician, clergyman, and statesman. He is one of 4 physicians to sign the Declaration of Independence. St. John's Parish, in which Sunbury is located, was a hotbed of radical sentiment. Georgia was not initially represented in the First Continental Congress, however, through Hall's influence, the parish was persuaded to send a delegate – Hall himself – to Philadelphia, for the Second Continental Congress. He was admitted to a seat in 1775.

In January 1779, Sunbury was burned by the British. Hall's family fled to the North, where they remained until the British evacuation in 1782. Hall returned to Georgia, settling in Savannah. In January 1783, he was elected governor. While governor, Hall advocated the chartering of a state university, believing that education, particularly religious education, would result in a more virtuous citizenry. His efforts led to the chartering of the University of Georgia in 1785. At the end of his term as governor, he resumed his medical practice. In 1790, Hall moved to a plantation in Burke County, Georgia, on the Carolina border, where he died at the age of 66. Signers Monument, a granite obelisk in front of the courthouse in Augusta, Georgia, memorializes Hall and the other two Georgians who signed the Declaration of Independence. His remains were re-interred there in 1848 after being exhumed from his original plantation grave.





George Walton - Adopted by an uncle after his parents died, he entered apprenticeship as a carpenter. Once his apprenticeship ended, he moved to Savannah, Georgia, in 1769 to study law and was admitted to the bar in 1774. He was one of the most successful lawyers in Georgia. In 1776 he served as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, and signed the Declaration of Independence.

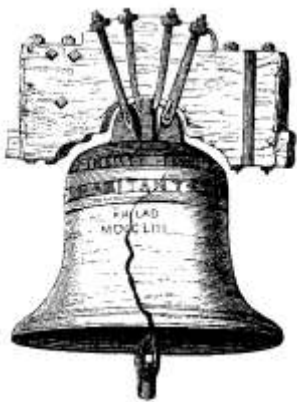
During the American Revolutionary War, he received a commission as colonel of the First Georgia Regiment of Militia. During the first Battle of Savannah in 1778, Walton was hit in the thigh, thrown from his horse, and taken prisoner. He was subsequently sent to Sunbury Prison, where colonial prisoners were held until exchanged in October 1779.

In October 1779, Walton was elected Governor of Georgia for the first time. In November 1795, he was appointed to the United States Senate. Walton only served until a successor, Josiah Tattnall, was officially elected.

He was a political ally of the Scottish General Lachlan McIntosh and a foe of Button Gwinnett. He and Gwinnett's political battles resulted in his expulsion from office and indictment for various criminal activities. Walton was in favor of the Yazoo land sales, the massive real estate fraud perpetrated in the mid-1790s by Georgia governor George

Mathews and the Georgia General Assembly.

Walton devoted himself almost exclusively to Georgia state politics, serving as chief justice, as a commissioner to negotiate a treaty with the Cherokee, a member of the Augusta Board of Commissioners, and a commissioner to settle the border dispute between South Carolina and Georgia. He was elected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 but declined. Walton was elected to a second term as governor in 1789. During his term, Georgians adopted a new state constitution, and moved the capital to Augusta. Walton served as a judge of the superior court from 1790 until his death. He was a founder and trustee of Franklin College (now the University of Georgia) in Athens. He was initially buried at Rosney, home of his nephew Robert Watkins; however, he was re-interred in 1848 beneath the Signers Monument in front of the courthouse on Greene Street in Augusta.



Liberty Bell – The Pennsylvania Assembly ordered the Bell in 1751 to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges, Pennsylvania's original Constitution. It speaks of the rights and freedoms valued by people the world over. The quotation "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," from Leviticus 25:10, was cast into the bell.

There is widespread disagreement about when the first crack appeared on the Bell. Hair-line cracks on bells were bored out to prevent expansion. However, it is agreed that the final expansion of the crack which rendered the Bell un-ringable was on Washington's Birthday in 1846.

The Bell achieved its iconic status when abolitionists adopted the Bell as a symbol for the movement. It was the abolitionists who gave it the name "Liberty Bell," in reference to its inscription. It was previously called simply the "State House bell."

In 1847, George Lippard wrote a fictional story for The Saturday Currier which told of an elderly bellman waiting in the State House steeple for the word that Congress had declared Independence. He began to doubt Congress's resolve. Suddenly the bellman's grandson, who was eavesdropping on the doors of Congress, yelled to him, "Ring, Grandfather! Ring!" The story captured the imagination of the American people so that the Liberty Bell was forever associated with the Declaration of Independence. The truth is that the steeple was in bad condition and historians today highly doubt that the Bell actually rang in 1776. However, its association with the Declaration of Independence was fixed in the collective mythology.

On every Fourth of July, at 2pm Eastern time, children who are descendants of Declaration signers symbolically tap the Liberty Bell 13 times while bells across the nation also ring 13 times in honor of the patriots from the original 13 states. Each year, the bell is gently tapped in honor of Martin Luther King Day. The ceremony began in 1986 at request of Dr. King's widow, Coretta Scott King.