

Charles Carroll of Carrollton: Citizen, Signer, and Statesman

Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737-1832), was one of four Maryland signers of the Declaration of Independence.¹ As a Catholic, he could not vote before the American Revolution, but nevertheless was well respected by his fellow Marylanders, serving in several elected and appointed positions.² Elected as a delegate to the Continental Congress, Carroll later served in the Maryland State Legislature, and in the United States Senate as Maryland's first senator.³ Previously, Carroll had used his wit and substantial education to speak out against the Royal Governor's proclamations limiting the liberties of Marylanders.⁴ A staunch patriot, Charles Carroll spent most of his life in the service of his new country, hoping his efforts would help liberty continue to flourish both in the United States of America and in his home state.

In 1773, Maryland's Royal Governor Robert Eden issued a proclamation regulating the fees paid and stipends issued to public officers, which was opposed by the publicly elected Lower House of the State Legislature. The current Attorney General, Daniel Dulany, published letters under the pseudonym "Antillon" supporting the governor in the *Maryland Gazette*. In the form of dialogues, "First Citizen" argued against the governor's position but was overwhelmed by Dulany's "Second Citizen."⁵

Carroll took the opportunity, stepping into the place of the fictional man created by Dulany. He reopened the argument, and it continued over months, with Carroll continuing to sign

¹ Joseph H. Cromwell, *The Maryland Men Who Signed The Declaration of Independence*. Annapolis, MD: Maryland Bicentennial Commission, 1977, 16.

² "Charles Carroll of Carrollton: Father of the Electoral College." History on the Net. 2000-2021. <https://www.historyonthenet.com/founding-fathers-charles-carroll>.

³ Edward C Papenfuse, Alan F. Day, David W. Jordan, and Gregory A. Stiverson. "A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature, 1635-1789." Maryland State Archives. Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000200/000209/pdf/carrollbiodic.pdf>.

⁴ Joseph H. Cromwell, *The Maryland Men Who Signed The Declaration of Independence*, 17.

⁵ "Dictionary of American Biography." Maryland State Archives, Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000200/000209/pdf/dab.pdf>.

his letters as the “First Citizen,” defending independent legislatures and arguing that any government must work for the benefit of all those under it. Dulany eventually resorted to ad hominem attacks against “First Citizen,” while Carroll responded with substantial restraint, pointing out how Dulany’s personal attacks exposed his tenuous arguments. During this time Charles’ identity was revealed, and he truly became “First Citizen” of Maryland in the eyes of her people.⁶ In memory of Charles Carroll and in recognition of this event, the president of the Maryland State Senate presents the First Citizen Award “to Marylanders who have been dedicated and effective participants in the process of making government work for the benefit of all.”⁷

In 1774, Carroll played a substantial part in Maryland’s own version of the Boston Tea Party. The *Peggy Stewart*, a small brig, brought tea to Annapolis despite the colonies’ non-importation resolutions. When the ship arrived in the port, colonists threatened the vessel’s owner, Anthony Stewart, with cries of “Liberty and independence or death in pursuit of it.” In response, several of Stewart’s friends came to Carroll for advice and protection. Carroll, knowing he could not protect Stewart unless he listened to the colonists’ demands, advised him to burn his ship, along with all the tea on board. To ensure his safety, Stewart set fire to the ship himself, and was forced to kneel before the people, ask for forgiveness, and sign a “confession.” In contrast to Boston, Maryland was not punished for its tea party, even more remarkably due to the fact that no attempt was made to disguise the patriots involved in the event.⁸

Discounting none of Charles Carroll’s many other accomplishments, one of his crowning moments was his signing of the Declaration of Independence. After he returned from a failed

⁶ “Dictionary of American Biography.” Maryland State Archives, Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000200/000209/pdf/dab.pdf>.

⁷ “The First Citizen Award.” Maryland State Archives. 2007. <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdstatehouse/html/firstcitizen.html>.

⁸ Joseph H. Cromwell, *The Maryland Men Who Signed The Declaration of Independence*, 17-18.

diplomatic mission to Canada to persuade French Canadians to aid the new United Colonies in their rebellion, Carrol arrived back in Annapolis for the provincial convention.⁹ He insisted the instructions given to the Maryland delegates be changed “to concur with the other United Colonies, or a majority of them in declaring the United Colonies free and independent states.” This made it possible for the state’s representatives in Congress to vote affirmatively for independence, and to later approve the final version of the Declaration of Independence.¹⁰

Interestingly enough, due to the slow communication at the time, the State convention appointed him as a representative and sent him to the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, two days after the Declaration had been approved. While too late to vote, he arrived on July 8, well in time to add his signature to the historic document.¹¹

Carroll is thought to have been one of the wealthiest men in America at the time, and thus stood to lose much from publicly committing treason and potentially signing his life away. It is said that when he signed his name, a delegate near him noted that he had a cousin in Maryland, also named Charles Carroll, and that perhaps any punishment would be inflicted on that man instead of the actual signatory. In response, Carroll immediately seized the pen and wrote ‘of Carrollton’ after his name, saying “They cannot mistake me now!” Although this moment makes for a good story, in actuality he appended that location to his name to differentiate himself from his father and cousins with his same name after his return to Maryland from Europe in 1765.¹²

Excluding the actions Carroll took on the national scale, he also played a pivotal role at the state level. Carroll continued to serve as a member of Congress until 1778, when he left his

⁹ Edward C Papenfuse, Alan F. Day, David W. Jordan, and Gregory A. Stiverson. “A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature, 1635-1789.” Maryland State Archives. Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000200/000209/pdf/carrollbiodic.pdf>.

¹⁰ Joseph H. Cromwell, *The Maryland Men Who Signed The Declaration of Independence*, 18-19.

¹¹ B.J. Lossing, *Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence*. Aledo, TX: WallBuilders Inc, 1996, 160.

¹² “Dictionary of American Biography.” Maryland State Archives, Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000200/000209/pdf/dab.pdf>.

seat, and devoted himself to the service of his home state. When he returned to Maryland, he assisted in the formation of the state's government, and helped to create Maryland's constitution. He was elected to the Maryland Senate in 1781, and served there until 1801 after taking a short break to serve as Maryland's first United States Senator from 1789 to his resignation in 1792 after the adoption of the U.S. Constitution. Having spent considerable amounts of his fortune to finance the revolution, he retired to his manor in 1800 to care for his estate.¹³

Charles Carroll of Carrollton served his state and continued to do what he could for his country. As a citizen, signer, and statesman, Carroll's position as a Founding Father and the respect he earned from his positions carried through the rest of his life. When he died on November 14, 1832, he was envied by many as the United States' wealthiest citizen, and after the deaths of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on July 4, 1826, was revered for the final six years of his life as the last living signer of the Declaration of Independence.¹⁴ Considering everything that Carroll did for his country and state despite the risk to himself and his family, it cannot be denied that he truly was "First Citizen."

¹³ Edward C Papenfuse, Alan F. Day, David W. Jordan, and Gregory A. Stiverson. "A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature, 1635-1789." Maryland State Archives. Accessed December 21, 2021. <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000200/000209/pdf/carrollbiodic.pdf>.

¹⁴ Joseph H. Cromwell, *The Maryland Men Who Signed The Declaration of Independence*, 19.

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Benjamin Caldwell, homeschooled since pre-k, is currently in his Senior year of highschool. He has a composite score of 35 on his ACT, and has taken a rigorous course load over his highschool years, including: AP US Government, AP Psychology, AP US History, AP Physics 1&2, AP English Literature, AP Music Theory, AP Calculus AB, Honors Macroeconomics and Microeconomics with the AP Exam, Honors American Literature, Honors Chemistry, and all Honors Math courses.

Music has been one of Ben's principal extracurricular activities. Along with many years of private lessons, he has played trumpet in King's Cathedral Youth Band's Wind Ensemble and Jazz Band since eighth grade, becoming section leader in his Freshman year. He was selected for the Mid-Atlantic Honor Band at Shenandoah Conservatory in 2019, 2020, and 2022, and the Mountaineer Band, the most advanced of three bands, at the High School Invitational Honor Band at West Virginia University in 2020. He enjoys playing a variety of musical genres, as well as bugle calls, and is currently taking an AP Music Theory course.

Since first grade, Ben has participated in various youth organizations, including completing all of the Cub Scout Program, and being an active member and youth leader in Boy Scouts of America for several years. He continued his involvement in youth organizations through Trail Life USA as Patrol Leader and Instructor. He recently earned Trail Life's highest honor, the Freedom Award.

During the summer, he swims competitively for the Lake Marion Lasers, as well as working full time as a lifeguard. Besides his school and work obligations, Ben enjoys running on the paths and trails around his home, serving at his church, and with his love of history, enjoys volunteering as a historical interpreter, studying the Civil War, and visiting the many battlefields and historic sites scattered across the Eastern United States.