

## JOHN MORTON LIFE

**John Morton (1724 to 1777)**  
**Ann Justice (Justis, Justic) (wife, 1732 to 1799)**

### Signer of Declaration of Independence

John Morton's legal career commenced in 1757 and continued through 1774. His positions included Justice of the Peace, High Sheriff of the County of Chester, presiding Judge of the Court of General Quarters Session, Common Pleas of the County of Chester and Associate Judge of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. In 1770 John Morton's name appears as the Justice of Orphan's Court where he was the presiding officer until March 25, 1774. It would appear that John Morton's common sense approach to legal matters bought him the necessary public respect that these positions required.

As the Chester County representative to the Pennsylvania Assembly John Morton served in a variety of position. In 1765 John Morton was one of three delegates appointed by the Pennsylvania Assembly to attend the Stamp Act Congress and it was he who brought that report back. In 1774, while serving as Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, he was voted to be a delegate to the First Continental Congress held in Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia. On November 4, 1775 he was elected to the Second Continental Congress which was held in the State House, later renamed Independence Hall. The delegation to the Second Continental Congress, with Robert Morris and John Dickenson, absenting themselves and with Willing and Humphreys voting nay and with Franklin and James Wilson voting aye, it fell upon John Morton to cast the deciding vote for independence and he did so on July 4, 1776. He returned to the statehouse on August 2, to affix his name to the Declaration of Independence. It is said that Pennsylvania, because of John Morton's deciding vote is nicknamed the "Keystone State". For without Pennsylvania's vote for independence the probability of it being adopted was doubtful. In 1776 and 1777 John Morton became Chairman of the Committee of the Whole and was heavily involved in writing the Articles of Confederation, the new nation's first form of government. Unfortunately, he did not live to see his efforts realized.

Although Philadelphia was approximately 14 miles from his farm in Ridley Township it required at least half a day to make that trip thus adding to his many burdens. Serving on so many colonial and then national committees Mr. Morton had to have spent many days and weeks away from home.

During his long tenure as a public official of Pennsylvania he was also heavily involved in St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Chester as well as in the Swedish church. When John Morton died he was buried St. Paul's Church yard.

Two and a half months after his death on June 18, 1777 Benjamin Rush wrote a letter to Anthony Wayne in which he discussed problems concerning the state's new Constitution. In that letter he wrote "Honest John Morton, your old correspondent, it is said, died of grief at the prospect of the misery he foresaw would be brought upon Pennsylvania by her present form of government". Many historians have misinterpreted this quote as a rejection of his vote for independence as well as his signing of the Declaration of Independence. A careful reading of the entire letter deals with Pennsylvania's new form of government and this new government is about which John Morton was referring. Also, the claim that John Morton had a death bed scene in which he purportedly said "tell them that they will live to see the hour when they shall acknowledge it to have been the most glorious service that I ever rendered my country". This alleged quote began to appear sometime in the early 1900's. However, there is no factual foundation for this alleged quote made by him.