

JOHN MORTON LIFE

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

Signer of Declaration of Independence

John Morton showed his fervor for independence in a letter written by him to Thomas Powell, a merchant in London, dated June 8, 1775. In this letter he expressed not only his resolves for independence but his concerns for the coming war. These sentiments reflected the feelings of many people in the colonies. "We are really preparing for the worst that can happen viz, a civil war". He goes on to say "I hope Time will manifest to the World that a steady Perseverance in the Cause of Freedom will triumph over all the deep lay'd Schemes of Tyranny, & that Britain & America will again be united on the solid Foundation of Commerce & the Constitution." In what appears to be righteous anger John Morton writes, "You have declared the New England People Rebels, & the other Provinces Aiders & Abettors, this is putting the Halter about our Necks, & we may as well die by the Sword as be hang'd like Rebels, this has made the People desperate." These same sentiments are reflected in the Declaration of Independence.

Some individuals have suggested that the concluding sentence "I sincerely wish a Reconciliation, the Contest is horrid, Parents against Children, & Children against Parents, the longer the wound is left in the present state the worse it will be to heal at last" indicates a lack of support for the road leading to independence. However, many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence harbored the same concerns and fears, as in fact civil war did break out in many of the colonies during the Revolutionary War.

John Morton, as Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, on April 6, 1776, in further testimony to independence signed a resolution appointing Ludowick Sprogle as "muster master of the forces of this province for the protection there of against all hostile enterprises and for the defense of American Liberty." This suggests a man who is leading cautiously, but inexorability towards affixing his signature on the Declaration of Independence.

In September 1777 after the Battle of Brandywine which the British won, Anne Morton, John Morton's wife fled across the Delaware River with what valuables she could take to Billingsport, New Jersey. It was during this time that many of the papers that belonged to John Morton, as well as household possessions were destroyed. In November 18, 1782 Anne Morton filed an accounting of the losses she suffered in compliance with an act of the General Assembly. This is unfortunate because this documentary evidence could have broadened our understanding of John Morton's private and public life.

John Morton with his wife, Ann, had nine children: Aaron, the eldest child, Sketchley, a major in the Pennsylvania line of the Continental Line, Rebecca, John, who became a surgeon and died while a prisoner of war on the British ship, Falmouth in New York Harbor, Sarah, Lydia, Elizabeth, Mary, and Ann, whose husband, Captain John Davis fought in the Revolutionary War as an officer in the Pennsylvania line.

On July 5, 2004 in recognition of John Morton's role in signing the Declaration of Independence a plaque was placed at his gravesite by the Descendents of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence. He was the first of the fifty-six signers to receive this honor. Many of the descendents of John Morton including the Ward and Stromberg families were in attendance as well as Grace Staller, the Plaque Committee chairperson. John Morton's vote for independence from England helped to assure America's future as a free and independent country.