

**JOHN MORTON LIFE**

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

**Signer of Declaration of Independence**

John Morton was a native of Ridley, in the county of Chester, now Delaware. His ancestors were of Swedish extraction, and among the first Swedish emigrants, who located themselves on the banks of the Delaware. His father, after whom he was called, died a few months previously to his birth. His mother was some time after married to an Englishman, who possessed a more than ordinary education, and who, with great kindness, on young Morton's becoming of the proper age, superintended and directed his education at home. Here his active mind rapidly expanded, and gave promise of the important part which he was destined to act in the subsequent history of his country.

About the year 1764, he was commissioned as a justice of the peace, and was sent as a delegate to the general assembly of Pennsylvania. Of this body he was for many years an active and distinguished member, and for some time the speaker of the house of representatives. The following year he was appointed by the house of representatives of Pennsylvania to attend the general congress at New-York. The object and proceedings of this congress are too well known to need a recital in this place.

In 1766, Mr. Morton was appointed sheriff of the county in which he lived, an office which he continued to hold for the three following years, and the duties of which he discharged with great satisfaction to the public. Some time after, he was elevated to a seat on the bench, in the superior court of Pennsylvania.

Of the memorable congress of 1774 he was a member, and continued to represent the state of Pennsylvania in the national assembly, through the memorable session of that body which gave birth to the declaration of American Independence.

On the occurrence of the momentous subject of independence, in the continental congress, Mr. Morton unexpectedly found himself placed in a delicate and trying situation. Previously to the 4th of July, the states of Delaware and Pennsylvania had voted in opposition to that measure. Great doubts were therefore entertained by the other members of congress, how the Pennsylvania and Delaware delegations would act. Much was obviously depending upon them, for it was justly apprehended, that should these two states decline to accede to the measure, the result might prove most unfortunate.

Happily, the votes of both these states were, at length, secured in favor of independence. But, as the delegation from Pennsylvania were equally divided, it fell to Mr. Morton to give his casting vote. The responsibility which he thus assumed was great, and even fearful, should the measure be attended by disastrous results. Mr. Morton, however, was a man of firmness and decision, and, in the spirit of true patriotism, he enrolled his vote in favor of the liberty of his country. Considering his novel and solemn situation, he deserves to be remembered with peculiar respect, by the free and independent yeomanry of America.

In the following year, he assisted in organizing a system of confederation, and was chairman of the committee of the whole, at the time it was finally agreed to, on the 15th of November, 1777. During the same year, he was seized with an inflammatory fever, which, after a few days, ended his mortal existence, in the 64th year of his age. Mr. Morton was a professor of religion, and a truly excellent man. To the poor he was ever kind; and to an affectionate family, consisting of a wife, three sons, and five daughters, he was an affectionate husband and father. His only enemies were those who would not forgive him because of his vote in favor of independence. During his last sickness, and even on the verge of the eternal world, he remembered them, and requested those who stood round him, to tell them, that the hour would yet come, when it would be acknowledged, that his vote in favor of American independence was the most illustrious act of his life.