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Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons in the revolutionary army. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the revolutionary war.

They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

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 in rags.

Thomas McKeam served in Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr., noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. Nelson 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 enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

Vandals or soldiers or both, looted the properties of Ellery, Clymer, Hall, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Norris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Such were the stories and sacrifices of the American Revolution. These were not wild eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. They were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. Standing tall, straight, and unwavering, they pledged: "For the support of this declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

Thank you to those who sacrificed to establish our freedom, thank you to the brave who fight now to protect our freedom and thank you to you, who continue to offer the opportunity of freedom to those we serve.

Thank you for your generosity to the Food and Fuel for Life program.

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The Food & Fuel for Life program is administered by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of St. Louis. All proceeds provide food and energy assistance to families and individuals in need throughout the entire Archdiocese of St. Louis. Visit our website at www.servingthepoor.com



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