

CORBAN Blake Burrell - MS

Carter Braxton was born on September 10, 1716 in King and Queen County, Virginia to a wealthy planter. His mother died when he was 7 days old, and when he was but a teenager his father passed away. After his father's passing, he inherited the large estate, which included five plantations and many slaves, along with his father's occupation.

After studying at William and Mary College, he married (at age 19) Judith Robinson, who gave him two children. Unfortunately she died while giving birth to her second child.

Mr. Braxton enjoyed a couple of years in England, which improved both his mind and manners; he came back to America and found that his brother had built a brick mansion for him, which he called Elsing Green. He then remarried to the King's Receiver-General's daughter named Elizabeth Corbin. She gave him 16 children, though several of them died in infancy and childhood.

In 1761 he entered the House of Burgesses as a representative of King and Queen County, where he served until 1771. In 1772, he was elected sheriff of his hometown and served there until the next year.

Braxton was known as a very "affectionate and obliging"¹ husband, father, neighbor, and friend. He was a very kind, generous, and hospitable man and

¹ Quoted in: Boyer, Marilyn: For You They Signed, pg: 236

enjoyed entertaining his friends and guests. Many of them were the wealthiest members of Virginian society.

In 1775 Braxton was called to a higher duty. When Peyton Randolph of the Constitutional Convention suddenly died, Mr. Braxton was elected to take his place. He was busy at work until 1776, when he signed the Declaration of Independence. Despite his patriotism, it was a hard decision to sign and break all ties with Great Brittan, since he had family there. It was known to all signers, as stated in the declaration, "we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our Sacred Honor."² Braxton was doing more than that. He was betraying one whole side of his family because of his marriage to the daughter of a British official. In 1786 he was appointed to be a member of the council of state of the commonwealth where he served until the 13th of March, 1791.

Braxton was clearly a supporter of slavery, for in two of his letters to Nicholas Brown he writes, "I am told there is a great traid carried on from Rhode Island to Guinea for Negroes, and I should be glad to enter into partnership with some Gentlemen for a voyage or two and have the Negroes sent here where I believe they sell as well as anywhere."³ He also states in a later letter that, "I shall

² Declaration of Independence. 1776.

³ Letter from Carter Braxton to Nicholas Brown. February 1, 1763. *Steering Committiee on Slavery and Justice, Voyage of the Sally*. Brown Digital Respository. Brown University Library. <http://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:303687/> (Original spelling was kept to maintain historical accuracy)

be very glad to be concerned in the Affrican Trade and will be a fourth of the voyage if you choose it," and again, "Gold Coast Slaves are esteemed the most valuable, and sell best. The price of Negroes keep up amasingly."⁴

Carter Braxton was a very zealous advocate for civil liberty, but is mostly known for his achievements of religious freedom. On October sixteenth, 1797, he suffered a stroke and died, leaving behind a reputation known as the Hospitable Patriot.

My Greatest friend and Dearest acquaintance George,

I received your letter and was absolutely heartbroken to hear about your father's passing! Even though he was sixty-one, he would have had at least several good years left had it not been for that stroke! In Exodus 20:12 the Lord says, "Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."⁵ He may not have lived as long as he should have, but his legacy will live on. Think, though George, how many lives have likely been saved by this one life. An advocate for religious liberty is hard to find, and had it not been for him, this country may have become a persecuted nation!

⁴ Letter from Carter Braxton to Nicholas Brown, October 16, 1763. *Steering Committiee on Slavery and Justice, Voyage of the Sally*. Brown Digital Respository.

<http://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:303687/> (Original spelling was kept to maintain historical accuracy)

⁵ Holy Bible, Student Edition, ESV. Pg. 95.

Through his life, he did many things for our nation and religious peace. He was a man of duty and honor, and was likely the only man who had no emotion plain on his face while signing the Declaration, for his father-in-law was British, which meant he was betraying family. But most importantly, of all his accomplishments, he stayed loyal to his country.

Sincerely yours,

William Brown

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