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Allie Dollard

2023 Essay Contest: Lesser Known Signers of The Declaration of Independence

Francis Hopkinson

The Declaration of Independence was signed by 56 men, and yet we can only name a few of them. I am here to tell you about Francis Hopkinson, one of the lesser known, but remarkable men who signed the Declaration.

Francis came into this world on October 2, 1737. Little else is known about his childhood, but he loved to learn. When he was eighteen, he went to the College of Philadelphia and was the first person to graduate in 1757, and in 1760 he received his master's degree. One year later, Francis was appointed the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Provincial Council. When he tired of this job, Hopkinson left America and went to Europe hoping to find work. Unfortunately, he found no work and was forced to return home. When he arrived home, he met a pretty girl named Ann Borden. They were married on September 1, 1768. Francis and Ann were blessed with five children. In 1764, they moved to Bordentown, New Jersey. Once there Francis became a member of the New Jersey Provincial Council.

The Congress of 1776 was an important one. At this meeting, delegates were going to vote for independence, and it was important that all the colonies voted unanimously. But the delegates from New Jersey weren't ready for independence

and were thinking about voting against the motion. These delegates were dismissed from Congress and Francis Hopkinson was called upon to take their place. And just like that he found himself voting yes and standing around the table signing the Declaration of Independence, with famous men such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

Along with signing the Declaration, Francis Hopkinson also designed our flag, this feat is usually attributed to Betsy Ross, but Francis had the idea of making our stripes go length ways. He thought they would be easier to see when flying from the mast of a ship. Other than this Francis wrote music and poetry and was one of the men who helped to make our Constitution. In September of 1789, he was appointed the judge to the United States Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. He only served as judge for a few years when he tragically passed away on May 9, 1791, at the young age of fifty-three.

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Philadelphia

May 11, 1791

My Dear Eliza,

It pains me to write you this letter but write I must. Your Uncle Francis Hopkinson was an amazing man, and I am sorry to hear that he died two days ago and only being fifty-three! America will miss him greatly. I remember the educated way he used to talk. Did you know, he attended the college right here in Philadelphia? I know that you know this already, but a grieving heart needs to tell a friend their pain. Mr. Hopkinson signed both our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

It is so nice to think, isn't it, that he was born and grew-up in the same town we did. Even though I know Mr. Hopkinson was a delegate for New Jersey, part of me keeps thinking of him as part of Pennsylvania, which I guess he will always be in my mind. I hope the world never forgets what this wonderful man has done for our country. He helped Betsy Ross design our flag, and he was part of the New Jersey and Pennsylvania Provincial Councils. And after he did all that, he became our own dear judge. Don't you think he was a good one, my dear, Eliza? It is a shame his term was cut short by his death. I find sometimes that words of the loved one lost

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are a sound pleasant to a griever's ear. I shall quote Mr. Hopkinson's words for you:

"There is all the Difference in the World between a Thing *done*, & a Thing *to be done*. A Thing *to be done* is exposed, like our new Constitution, to all Manner of Criticisms, Objections, Oppositions, Reasonings true & false, with Arguments & Apprehensions founded on future Consequences, possible and impossible. On the Contrary, a Thing *done*, unless it is a very bad thing indeed, is not only generally admitted, but often even zealously supported, beyond it's real Merits—The Tide of Prejudice flows in its Favour."<sup>1</sup>

I don't know about you, Eliza, but I will never forget this marvelous Mr. Hopkinson and all that he has done for our nation.

Your Dear and Loving Friend,

Mary Ann Parkerton

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<sup>1</sup> A letter from Hopkins to Washington, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-01-02-0110>

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## Bibliography

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