

The Founding Fathers: Maryland

En Español

Daniel Carroll, Maryland



Daniel Carroll was member of a prominent Maryland family of Irish descent. A collateral branch was led by Charles Carroll of Carrollton, signer of the Declaration of Independence. Daniel's brother was John Carroll, the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States.

Daniel was born in 1730 at Upper Marlboro, MD. Befitting the son of a wealthy Roman Catholic family, he studied for 6 years (1742-48) under the Jesuits at St. Omer's in Flanders. Then, after a tour of Europe, he sailed home and soon married Eleanor Carroll, apparently a first cousin of Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Not much is known about the next two decades of his life except that he backed the War for Independence reluctantly and remained out of the public eye. No doubt he lived the life of a gentleman planter.

In 1781 Carroll entered the political arena. Elected to the Continental Congress that year, he carried to Philadelphia the news that Maryland was at last ready to accede to the Articles of Confederation, to which he soon penned his name. During the decade, he also began a tour in the Maryland senate that was to span his lifetime and helped George Washington promote the Patowmack Company, a scheme to canalize the Potomac River so as to provide a transportation link between the East and the trans-Appalachian West.

Carroll did not arrive at the Constitutional Convention until July 9, but thereafter he attended quite regularly. He spoke about 20 times during the debates and served on the Committee on Postponed Matters. Returning to Maryland after the convention, he campaigned for ratification of the Constitution but was not a delegate to the state convention.

In 1789 Carroll won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he voted for locating the Nation's Capital on the banks of the Potomac and for Hamilton's program for the federal assumption of state debts. In 1791 George Washington named his friend Carroll as one of three commissioners to survey and define the District of Columbia, where Carroll owned much land.

Ill health caused him to resign this post 4 years later, and the next year at the age of 65 he died at his home near Rock Creek in Forest Glen, MD. He was buried there in St. John's Catholic Cemetery.

Image: Courtesy of The Maryland Historical Society

Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer, Maryland



Jenifer was born in 1723 of Swedish and English descent at Coates Retirement (now Ellerslie) estate, near Port Tobacco in Charles County, Md. Little is known about his childhood or education, but as an adult he came into possession of a large estate near Annapolis, called Stepney, where he lived most of his life. He never married. The web of his far-reaching friendships included such illustrious personages as George Washington.

As a young man, Jenifer served as agent and receiver-general for the last two proprietors of Maryland. He also filled the post of justice of the peace in Charles County and later for the western circuit of Maryland. In 1760 he sat on a boundary commission that settled disputes between Pennsylvania and Delaware. Six years later, he became a member of the provincial court and from 1773 to 1776 sat on the Maryland royal governor's council.

Despite his association with conservative proprietary politics, Jenifer supported the Revolutionary movement, albeit at first reluctantly. He served as president of the Maryland council of safety (1775-77), then as president of the first state senate (1777-80). He sat in the Continental Congress (1778-82) and held the position of state revenue and financial manager (1782-85).

A conservative nationalist, Jenifer favored a strong and permanent union of the states and a Congress with taxation power. In 1785 he represented Maryland at the Mount Vernon Conference. Although he was one of 29 delegates who attended nearly every session of the Constitutional Convention, he did not speak often but backed Madison and the nationalist element.

Jenifer lived only 3 more years and never again held public office. He died at the age of 66 or 67 at Annapolis in 1790. The exact location of his grave, possibly at Ellerslie estate, is unknown.

Image: Courtesy of The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Luther Martin, Maryland



Like many of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, Luther Martin attended the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), from which he graduated with honors in 1766. Though born in Brunswick, NJ., in 1748, Martin moved to Maryland after receiving his degree and taught there for 3 years. He then began to study the law and was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1771.

Martin was an early advocate of American independence from Great Britain. In the fall of 1774 he served on the patriot committee of Somerset County, and in December he attended a convention of the Province of Maryland in Annapolis, which had been called to consider the recommendations of the Continental Congress. Maryland appointed Luther Martin its attorney general in early 1778. In this capacity, Martin vigorously prosecuted Loyalists, whose numbers were strong in many areas. Tensions had even led to insurrection and open warfare in some counties. While still attorney general, Martin joined the Baltimore Light Dragoons. In July 1781 his unit joined Lafayette's forces near Fredericksburg, VA., but Martin was recalled by the governor to prosecute a treason trial.

Martin married Maria Cresap on Christmas Day 1783. Of their five children, three daughters lived to adulthood. His postwar law practice grew to become one of the largest and most successful in the country. In 1785 Martin was elected to the Continental Congress, but this appointment was purely honorary. His numerous public and private duties prevented him from traveling to Philadelphia.

At the Constitutional Convention Martin opposed the idea of a strong central government. When he arrived on June 9, 1787, he expressed suspicion of the secrecy rule imposed on the proceedings. He consistently sided with the small states and voted against the Virginia Plan. On June 27 Martin spoke for more than 3 hours in opposition to the Virginia Plan's proposal for proportionate representation in both houses of the legislature. Martin served on the committee formed to seek a compromise on representation, where he supported the case for equal numbers of delegates in at least one house. Before the convention closed, he and another Maryland delegate, John Francis Mercer, walked out.

In an address to the Maryland House of Delegates in 1787 and in numerous newspaper articles, Martin attacked the proposed new form of government and continued to fight ratification of the Constitution through 1788. He lamented the ascension of the national government over the states and condemned what he saw as unequal representation in Congress. Martin opposed including slaves in determining representation and believed that the absence of a jury in the Supreme Court gravely endangered freedom. At the convention, Martin complained, the aggrandizement of particular states and individuals often had been pursued more avidly than the welfare of the country. The assumption of the term "federal" by those who favored a national government also irritated Martin. Around 1791, however, Martin turned to the Federalist party because of his animosity toward Thomas Jefferson.

The first years of the 1800s saw Martin as defense counsel in two controversial national cases. In the first Martin won an acquittal for his close friend, Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase, in his impeachment trial in 1805. Two years later Martin was one of Aaron Burr's defense lawyers when Burr stood trial for treason in 1807.

After a record 28 consecutive years as state attorney general, Luther Martin resigned in December 1805. In 1813 Martin became chief judge of the court of oyer and terminer for the City and County of Baltimore. He was reappointed attorney general of Maryland in 1818, and in 1819 he argued Maryland's position in the landmark Supreme Court case *McCulloch v. Maryland*. The plaintiff, represented by Daniel Webster, William Pinckney, and William Wirt, won the decision, which determined that states could not tax federal institutions.

Martin's fortunes declined dramatically in his last years. Heavy drinking, illness, and poverty all took their toll. Paralysis, which had struck in 1819, forced him to retire as Maryland's attorney general in 1822. In 1826, at the age of 78, Luther Martin died in Aaron Burr's home in New York City and was buried in an unmarked grave in St. John's churchyard.

Image: Courtesy of The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

James McHenry, Maryland



McHenry was born at Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland, in 1753. He enjoyed a classical education at Dublin, and emigrated to Philadelphia in 1771. The following year, the rest of his family came to the colonies, and his brother and father established an import business at Baltimore. During that year, James continued schooling at Newark Academy in Delaware and then studied medicine for 2 years under the well-known Dr. Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia.

During the War for Independence, McHenry served as a military surgeon. Late in 1776, while he was on the staff of the 5th Pennsylvania Battalion, the British captured him at Fort Mifflin, NY. He was paroled early the next year and exchanged in March 1778. Returning immediately to duty, he was assigned to Valley Forge, PA, and in May became secretary to George Washington. About this time, McHenry apparently quit the practice of medicine to devote himself to politics and administration; he apparently never needed to return to it after the war because of his excellent financial circumstances.

McHenry stayed on Washington's staff until 1780, when he joined that of the Marquis de Lafayette, and he remained in that assignment until he entered the Maryland Senate (1781-86). During part of this period, he served concurrently in the Continental Congress (1783-86). In 1784 he married Margaret Allison Caldwell.

McHenry missed many of the proceedings at the Philadelphia convention, in part because of the illness of his brother, and played an insubstantial part in the debates when he was present. He did, however, maintain a private journal that has been useful to posterity. He campaigned strenuously for the Constitution in Maryland and attended the state ratifying convention.

From 1789 to 1791, McHenry sat in the state assembly and in the years 1791-96 again in the senate. A staunch Federalist, he then accepted Washington's offer of the post of Secretary of War and held it into the administration of John Adams. McHenry looked to Hamilton rather than to Adams for leadership. As time passed, the latter became increasingly dissatisfied with McHenry's performance and distrustful of his political motives and in 1800 forced him to resign. Subsequently, the Democratic-Republicans accused him of maladministration, but a congressional committee vindicated him.

McHenry returned to his estate near Baltimore and to semiretirement. He remained a loyal Federalist and opposed the War of 1812. He also held the office of president of a Bible society. He died in 1816 at the age of 62, survived by two of his three children. His grave is in Baltimore's Westminster Presbyterian Cemetery.

Image: Courtesy of Independence National Historical Park

John Francis Mercer, Maryland



John Francis Mercer, born on May 17, 1759, was the fifth of nine children born to John and Ann Mercer of Stafford County, VA. He attended the College of William and Mary, and in early 1776 he joined the 3d Virginia Regiment. Mercer became Gen. Charles Lee's aide-de-camp in 1778, but after General Lee's court-martial in October 1779, Mercer resigned his commission. He spent the next year studying law at the College of William and Mary and then rejoined the army, where he served briefly under Lafayette.

In 1782 Mercer was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates. That December he became one of Virginia's representatives to the Continental Congress. He later returned to the House of Delegates in 1785 and 1786.

Mercer married Sophia Sprigg in 1785 and soon after moved to Anne Arundel County, MD. He attended the Constitutional Convention as part of Maryland's delegation when he was only 28 years old, the second youngest delegate in Philadelphia. Mercer was strongly opposed to centralization, and both spoke and voted against the Constitution. He and fellow Marylander Luther Martin left the proceedings before they ended.

After the convention, Mercer continued in public service. He allied himself with the Republicans and served in the Maryland House of Delegates in 1778-89, 1791-92, 1800-1801, and 1803-6. Between 1791 and 1794 he also sat in the U.S. House of Representatives for Maryland and was chosen governor of the state for two terms, 1801-3. During Thomas Jefferson's term as President, Mercer broke with the Republicans and joined the Federalist camp.

Illness plagued him during his last years. In 1821 Mercer traveled to Philadelphia to seek medical attention, and he died there on August 30. His remains lay temporarily in a vault in St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia and were reinterred on his estate, "Cedar Park" in Maryland.

Image: Courtesy of Independence National Historical Park

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