

Three Famous Catholic Grandsons

by Katie O'Brien

Can you answer the following questions?

1. *Who was the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence?*
2. *Who was the other Catholic man, besides Thomas Fitzsimmons, to sign the United States Constitution?*
3. *Who was the first American Bishop and later, first American Archbishop?*



All three of these famous American Catholics were from the same family. Two were brothers and the other a cousin. They were all grandsons of a man named Charles Carroll. Charles Carroll decided to leave his home in England to come to a new colony called Maryland. Life in England in the 1600's was very difficult for Catholics. Since Henry VIII split with the Catholic Church, the kings and queens of England (with the exception of Queen Mary) persecuted Catholics mercilessly, passing laws forbidding Catholics to worship publicly. Therefore, many Catholics were looking for a safe place to live where they could exercise their Catholic faith freely and openly.

In 1632, Lord Baltimore was given permission by the king to set up a colony for Catholics. This colony became known as Maryland. Although it started out as a safe place for Catholics, within just a few years, Protestants took over the state government and began passing laws forbidding Catholics to worship in public and soon took the vote away from them. Charles Carroll was a friend of Lord Baltimore and was offered the position of Attorney General in the colony. Shortly after arriving he lost his position in the government because of his religion, but he retained the land he was given and began a prosperous farm. He went on to have three grandsons who became very important people in our history.

Charles Carroll



One of his grandsons would become known as Charles Carroll "of Carrollton" to distinguish him from his grandfather, Charles Carroll "the Attorney General," and his father Charles Carroll "of Annapolis." As a boy, he was educated at Bohemia Manor Academy, which was a school run secretly by the Jesuits because Maryland law forbade instruction by Catholic priests. He later completed his education in France. He returned to Maryland, was given land by his family, and married. It was at this time that the colonists were becoming increasingly frustrated and angry about the oppressive taxes which England had imposed on them.

Charles wrote a series of articles for the Maryland Gazette and soon became a well known and well respected man. Because his critics could not compete with him intellectually, they attacked him on a personal level, ridiculing him because he was Catholic. He, however, stood firm and defended his religion. He was elected to several political positions in Maryland, which was amazing considering that neither he nor any other Catholic in the colony was allowed to vote. He served in the Continental Congress as a delegate from Maryland, and on July 4, 1776, Charles Carroll, along with other great men such as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin voted in favor of the Declaration of Independence.

Each man there knew that by signing his name he could be convicted of treason and probably hanged. Of all of the signers, Charles Carroll had the most to lose. He was not only a Catholic but also the wealthiest of all of the men. Therefore, if he was to be convicted of treason the Carroll family fortune would be confiscated by the British. When Charles approached the desk to sign the document, one man said jokingly, "There are so many Carrolls in Maryland, Charles can feel safe from reprisal!" Charles immediately added "of Carrollton" to his name and said, "Now King George will know with which Carroll he is dealing."

After the Revolution he was elected as a United States Senator and helped in drawing up a new Maryland constitution. Religion was always very important to Charles. Living in the time he did, it would have been much easier for him to deny his religion and convert to the Protestant faith as many did, but instead he stood firmly and proudly a Catholic. After doing so much for his country and Catholics in America he said, "...in looking back, the one thing that gives me the greatest satisfaction is that I practiced the duties of my religion." Charles Carroll of Carrollton died on November 4, 1832, at the age of 95 and was the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Daniel Carroll

Another grandson of Charles Carroll "the Attorney General" was Daniel Carroll, cousin to Charles Carroll "of Carrollton." Daniel, like his cousin, went to Europe for his education. Upon returning home he served in the Continental Congress and the House of Representatives. After the revolution he was chosen to represent Maryland in the Constitutional Convention. At this convention, delegates had the difficult task of trying to develop a completely new form of government in which there would be no king who could become too powerful.



Carroll led the fight at the convention for the idea that the President of the United States should be elected by the people and not the Congress. He was also responsible for creating Amendment X to the Constitution which protects states' rights. He was one of the two Catholic signers of the Constitution (Thomas Fitzsimmons was the other). He also served in many other political positions including the Maryland Senate and also was chosen to serve on the commission to choose the site of the new capital, Washington, D.C. The site that was chosen for the present day capital included part of his own farmland, which he donated to the government. Today the Capitol stands on a hill that once belonged to Daniel Carroll: patriot, statesman and benefactor to his country.

John Carroll



Vatican postage stamp of Bishop Carroll

Another grandson of Charles Carroll "the Attorney General," and brother of Daniel Carroll, was John Carroll. He attended Bohemia Manor with his cousin Charles Carroll and also went to Europe to finish his education. Unlike his cousin, John decided that he was being called to the religious life and entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1753. He was ordained into the Society of Jesus in 1761. In 1773, Pope Clement XIV dissolved the Jesuits, and Fr. John, still an ordained priest but without an order, decided to go back to Maryland in 1774.

In 1776, he was asked to go with his cousin Charles, Benjamin Franklin, and Samuel Chase to Canada to try to convince the Canadians to join the side of the colonists in the war. The commission was a failure, and he returned to Philadelphia with Ben Franklin who became quite ill on the trip. He later set up a small chapel on his brother Daniel's land and traveled many miles to administer sacraments and say Mass for as many Catholics in Maryland and surrounding colonies as he could.



Seal of Bishop Carroll

In 1788, Rome decided to create the first diocese in America. On September 17, 1789, Fr. John Carroll was named Bishop of the Baltimore diocese. At the time, the Baltimore diocese included all of the United States. In 1790 he surveyed his Church and found that out of a population of approximately 3,200,000 only 30,000 were Catholics. Those Catholics were scattered throughout the United States, and at the time, there were only 30 priests in the colonies to care for the spiritual needs of all of these Catholics.

During his years as Bishop and later, after being named the first Archbishop in America in 1808, Fr. Carroll invited dozens of religious orders to begin work in the United States, and founded many schools and colleges including Georgetown University. In short, he was the man most responsible for the growth of the Catholic Church in America. During his reign as Bishop and Archbishop, he created four new dioceses and organized the rules and goals for the Roman Catholic Church in America.