

Declaration of Independence - Signers Series

Samuel Huntington - Connecticut

Samuel Huntington was born in what is now Scotland, Connecticut, on July 5, 1731, the fourth of ten children of Nathaniel and Mehetabel Huntington. His education was limited to local schools, and at sixteen he began an apprenticeship as a cooper, or barrel maker. Despite his modest beginnings, Huntington pursued knowledge on his own, studying Latin and law with borrowed books, much like fellow Connecticut signer Roger Sherman. His self-education proved successful, and in 1754 he passed the bar and opened a practice in Norwich, one of the colony's most prosperous towns.

In 1761, Huntington married Martha Devotion. The couple had no children but when his brother passed, Samuel adopted his orphaned nephew, who later became governor of Ohio, and his niece. Huntington soon entered public service, briefly serving as a Norwich selectman before being elected to the Connecticut Assembly in 1764, a position he held for the next ten years. Royal Governor Jonathan Trumbull appointed him King's Attorney in 1765 and later, in 1774, to the Superior Court. The following year, he was elected to the Governor's Council.



Huntington's opposition to the Coercive Acts made him a natural choice for delegate to the Second Continental Congress in 1775. He voted for and signed the Declaration of Independence and remained an active delegate until 1781. When John Jay resigned as President of Congress in 1779, Huntington was elected to replace him. During his two-year tenure, he urged the states to provide funds and supplies for the Continental Army and brokered a crucial compromise on western land claims. This concession convinced Maryland to ratify the Articles of Confederation, making Huntington the first President of the United States in Congress Assembled. Illness, however, forced his resignation in 1781.

Returning home, Huntington continued in Connecticut politics, becoming Lieutenant Governor in 1785 and then Governor from 1786 until his death in 1796. He also presided over the Connecticut Convention of 1787-88, which ratified the U.S. Constitution. A man of quiet demeanor and steady judgment, Huntington was respected for his ability to foster unity, both within his state and on the national stage.