

Declaration of Independence - Signers Series

William Williams - Connecticut

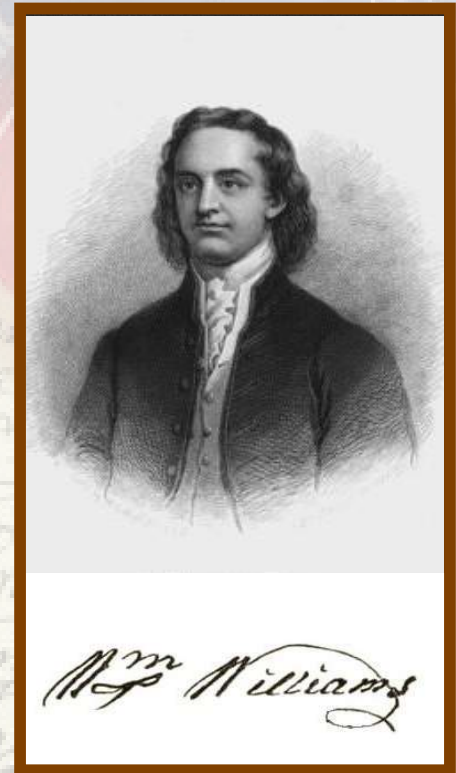
William Williams was born in Lebanon, Connecticut on April 23, 1731. After completing his local common school education at an age of 16, he followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps by going to Harvard, from which he graduated at age 20. Williams then commenced theological studies with his father. That course was interrupted in 1755 by his joining a regiment of provincial troops commanded by his uncle, Colonel Ephraim Williams, in the British military expedition to Lake George against the French and their Indian allies.

He returned home after that battle with a feeling of contempt for the British officers, who were haughty and condescending, and seemed to consider the colonists as inferior men. He changed careers by opening a store in Lebanon, and became a successful merchant.

In 1757, he was elected to the Connecticut Assembly, the start of thirty plus years of service in that position, in which, he rose to be the Speaker of the House in 1775 and 1776. In 1759, he was elected as Lebanon's Town Clerk, a position he would hold for over fifty years. A year later, Williams was then elected as a Lebanon Selectman, a position he held for the next quarter century.

His term as Speaker was short, as in June 1776 he was selected to replace Oliver Wolcott in the Continental Congress when Wolcott became ill and returned to Connecticut. Williams did not arrive in Philadelphia until the middle of July, so he did not have the opportunity to vote for the Declaration of Independence, but did sign it with many of the other delegates on August 2nd.

While in Congress, he sat on the Board of War, and also helped to frame the Articles of Confederation, although he did not sign that document.



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On the financial side, in 1775, he went door-to-door to raise money to defray the costs of sending our Connecticut troops to aid in the capture of Ft. Ticonderoga. Then in 1779, to facilitate the purchase of military supplies, he bought worthless Continental paper with \$2000 in coin, while realizing he might not ever be repaid.

During the Revolutionary War, he prepared state papers for his father-in-law, Governor Jonathan Trumbull, who had been the only Royal Governor who supported the American cause.

In the winter of 1780-1781, when a French Regiment under the Duc de Lauzon encamped in Lebanon, he moved out of his house so the officers would have a place to stay. Yes, this is the same de Lauzon who encamped in Wallingford on June 25, 1781 with his 800-1000 men, while on their way to Yorktown under the Comte De Rochambeau.

Williams was a delegate to the Hartford Convention in 1788 to act upon the Constitution. He had been sent to vote against it, but, although he had some reservations, he did vote for ratification, for what he saw, on balance, was a good framework for setting up the government of our country.

Over most of the last 23 years of his life, he served as a Windham County judge as well as Probate Judge for the Windham district. Then, when his oldest son died in 1810, it marked the beginning of the end for William, as he never recovered from that trauma. It was said that in his final few days "he went into a silent stupor, but called out in a clear voice to his departed son to attend his dying father to the world of the spirits and then expired on August 2, 1811."

