

Declaration of Independence - Signers Series

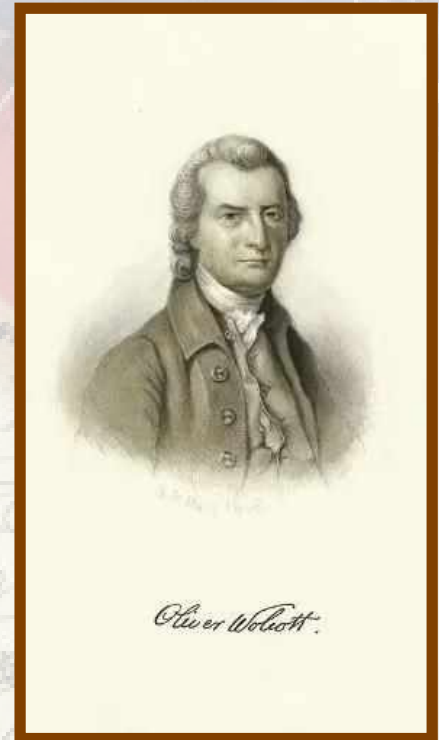
Oliver Wolcott - Connecticut

Oliver Wolcott, born in Windsor, Connecticut on November 20, 1726, the 14th of 15 children to Roger and Sarah Drake Wolcott, would follow in his father's footsteps both politically and militarily. His father had been a Major General, second in command of the New England troops in the taking of Fort Louisbourg, on Cape Breton, Canada from the French in 1745, and later served as Royal Governor of Connecticut in the early 1750s.

Oliver, a classmate of Wallingford's Lyman Hall, graduated at the top of the class of 1747 from Yale College. Following his graduation, New York Royal Governor George Clinton granted Wolcott a captain's commission to raise a militia company in defense of the northern border in the so-called King George War, the North American version of the War of Austrian Succession. With the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, that ended the war, Fort Louisbourg was returned to the French.

On his return to Connecticut, he studied medicine under his uncle in Goshen, but soon moved to Litchfield and took up law, and, also became a merchant. By 1751, he was elected sheriff of Litchfield county, a position he would hold for the next twenty years. He also represented Litchfield in the General Assembly, both in the lower and upper houses; later served as Judge of Probate and as Judge on the County Court. While doing all those tasks, he also served in the French and Indian War.

Just prior to the American Revolution, he was elected to the Connecticut Council and was also promoted to colonel of the militia. Then, in 1775 he was named commissary for the Connecticut troops, chosen a delegate to the First Continental Congress, which designated him as Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the northern department. In that capacity he attended a conference with the Iroquois Confederacy (Six Nations) in Albany, which temporarily gained their neutrality in the war. To close out the year, he helped arbitrate land disputes between Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York and Vermont.



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The following year would be the start of his serving seven of the next eight years in the second Continental Congress, where he signed both the Declaration of Independence and later the Articles of Confederation. He continued his military duties, now as a brigadier & later a major general of 14 Connecticut regiments to defend New York. These duties kept him from voting on the Declaration, but five days after the vote, when General Washington read the document to the troops in New York City, a contingent of troops toppled a 4000 pound lead statue of King George III and chopped it into small pieces. Wolcott arranged for the collection of the pieces, sans the head, which was last seen in London, England in 1777, and shipped them to Litchfield. There, the ladies of Litchfield made them into 42,088 bullets, many of which General Wolcott took to the Battle of Saratoga, where his militia helped defeat General Burgoyne.

After Saratoga, Wolcott was in charge of the Connecticut troops who were to guard the coast from incursions by the British, particularly by New York Governor Tryon. That did not go quite as well as Saratoga had, although the British were quickly dispatched from Fairfield and Norwalk.

After the war, he helped negotiate treaties with the Iroquois and Wyandottes by which land was ceded to the United States in New York and in the Western Reserve in Ohio.

1786 found him elected as Lieutenant Governor, a position he would hold for ten years, when on the death of fellow signer, Governor Samuel Huntington, he ascended to be Governor. He held that but for little more than a year when he passed on December 1, 1797. "He was a devoted patriot who was regarded by the leaders of the Revolution to be a brave defender of the cause."

Oliver Wolcott's house, built in 1753, still stands on South Street in the Town of Litchfield, CT.

