

The Huguenot Legacy in the Revolutionary War

Based on the article by Janice Murphy Lorenz, *Happy 250th to America and our Huguenot Founders*

The contributions of Huguenots and their descendants to the founding of the United States are often overlooked. Many Huguenot-descended leaders brought with them family stories of religious persecution in France, as well as an education in political and governmental ideas. These experiences helped shape their support for liberty and self-government during the American Revolution and the creation of the nation's founding documents.

Several prominent Founding-era leaders were of Huguenot descent. George Washington, whose contributions to the founding of the nation were extensive, had Huguenot ancestry. John Jay served as president of the Continental Congress and later as a diplomat, while Henry Laurens of South Carolina and Elias Boudinot of New Jersey also served as presidents of the Continental Congress. Jay and Laurens helped negotiate and sign the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War. Other notable Huguenot descendants included Paul Revere and Alexander Hamilton, both of whom played important roles in the Revolution and the early United States.

Huguenot support for American independence also extended beyond political leadership. Many contributed their personal wealth and made significant sacrifices to support the Revolutionary cause. Gabriel Manigault provided a substantial personal loan to the war effort, while Peter Faneuil, a wealthy Boston merchant of Huguenot descent, donated the building that became Faneuil Hall. Known as the "Cradle of Liberty," Faneuil Hall became an important meeting place for colonists to discuss independence and protest British policies and taxation. Together, these contributions demonstrate the important role Huguenots and their descendants played in the struggle for American liberty.

Other Huguenot descendants included:

Brigadier General Francis Marion - known as the "Swamp Fox," was an American military officer, planter, and politician who served in the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War. During the American Revolution, he supported the Patriot cause and served in the Continental Army, fighting British forces in the southern theater from 1780 to 1781.

John Sevier - settled in the Tennessee Valley in the 1770s and became a military and political leader. He helped defend Fort Watauga during the American Revolution, served as a colonel at the Battle of Kings Mountain, and later led campaigns against the Cherokee. In the 1780s, he became the only governor of the State of Franklin and later served as brigadier general of the Southwest Territory militia. Sevier was Tennessee's governor for 11 years between 1796 and 1809 and later served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives before his death in 1815.

John Laurens - was an American soldier and statesman from South Carolina who served as George Washington's aide-de-camp during the Revolutionary War. He is best known for proposing that enslaved people be recruited as soldiers in exchange for their freedom. Although the Continental Congress approved his plan in 1779, political opposition in South Carolina prevented it from succeeding. Laurens was killed at the Battle of the Combahee River in 1782.

James Bowdoin II - was a wealthy Boston merchant and influential politician during the American Revolution. He opposed British policies, advocated for independence, and served as president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress from 1775 to 1777. In 1785, he became governor of Massachusetts and focused on reducing the state's Revolutionary War debt. His strict financial policies contributed to Shays' Rebellion, which he helped suppress by funding militia forces. Bowdoin was also a scientist and founded the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Gouverneur Morris - was an American statesman, Founding Father, and influential writer of the U.S. Constitution. He represented Pennsylvania at the 1787 Constitutional Convention, where he supported a strong central government and wrote the Constitution's famous Preamble. Morris was also an outspoken opponent of slavery and promoted the idea of a united American nation. He later served as U.S. minister to France and as a U.S. senator from New York from 1800 to 1803. After leaving the Senate, he helped develop plans for the Erie Canal and New York City's street grid.

Daniel Ravenel - was a South Carolina planter and political leader who represented St. John's, Berkeley Parish, during the American Revolution. In 1775, he served as a delegate to the First South Carolina Provincial Congress, which helped establish a revolutionary government in the colony as tensions with Britain grew. In 1776, he continued his service in the First South Carolina General Assembly, contributing to the development of South Carolina's new government during the transition from British rule to independence.