

## William Paca 1740-1799

**William Paca** was born on the **31st of October, 1740**. He was the second son of **John Paca**, a gentleman of large estate, who resided in the county of Harford, in the state of Maryland. His father, sensible of the importance of a good education, placed his son, at a proper age, in the college at Philadelphia, at that time under the care of the learned and eloquent **Dr. William Smith**. On commencing bachelor of arts, in 1750, he entered the office of **Stephen Bradley**, a distinguished lawyer of Annapolis, for the purpose of pursuing the profession of law.

Mr. Paca was a diligent student, and early gave promise of eminence in his profession. He was licensed to practice in 1761, and was admitted to the bar at the provincial court in 1764. He established himself at **Annapolis**, where he had for his competitors, **John Price, and Samuel Chase**, with the latter of whom he became intimately acquainted, and with whom he acted an important part during the revolutionary struggle.

The political career of Mr. Paca commenced in 1771, at which time he was appointed to represent the county in the popular branch of the legislature. At this time, and for several years after, much contention existed between the government of **Maryland**, which was proprietary, and the people. The government consisted of three branches: a house of burgesses, the members of which were selected by the people. The second branch was called the upper house, the members of which were elected and removed, at the pleasure of the proprietor. The governor formed the third branch, without whose assent no act of assembly was valid. And in addition to this, the proprietor himself, who generally resided in England, claimed the privilege of dissenting from such laws as he pleased, although they had received the sanction of the above branches of the legislature. Hence, there was often no small collision between the lower house, or those who represented the people, and the upper house and governor, who were considered as under the influence of the proprietor.

In this provincial assembly, Mr. Paca represented the people, whose interests he strongly felt, and faithfully guarded. The interests of the proprietor and of the people were often thought to be at variance. An avaricious and oppressive spirit marked the proceedings of the proprietor and his partisans. It was important, therefore, for the people, to have men to represent them in the house of burgesses, who understood their rights, and were sufficiently bold to assert and maintain them. Such a man was Mr. Paca. He was learned as to a knowledge of law, and of the principles of the proprietary government; and at all times, when necessary, sufficiently courageous to resist the aggressions of avarice, and the usurpations of tyranny.

The following anecdote will illustrate the bold and independent spirit of Mr. Paca. In 1771, an act expired in Maryland, the object of which was to regulate the staple of tobacco, and the fees of certain officers. This act the house of burgesses refused to continue, without a reduction of the officers' fees. As neither branch of the assembly would recede from the ground it had taken, the fee bill fell. In this state of things, the governor issued his proclamation directing the officers to proceed according to the old law.

The commotion excited throughout the province was great, and at some places, particularly at Annapolis, even tumultuous. At this latter place, a multitude of citizens collected to express their abhorrence of the conduct of the governor. At the head of this multitude were Mr. Paca and Mr. Chase. A procession was formed, and with these two gentlemen for leaders, they proceeded to a gallows which had been previously erected, upon which they hung the governor's proclamation, in due form, with a halter. At length it was taken down, enclosed in a coffin prepared for the purpose, and consigned to a grave dug beneath the gallows. During the whole ceremony, minute guns were fired from a schooner owned by Mr. Paca, which was stationed at no great distance. In conclusion, the citizens marched back to the city, where they devoted the remainder of the day to festivity.

The controversy to which we have now alluded had long existed, and continued to exist, quite down to the era of the revolutionary struggle. When that struggle commenced, about the year 1774, there were men, therefore, in Maryland, who were well prepared to enter into it, with energy and decision. They had been trained in the school of controversy. They had studied every chapter relating to American rights; and possessing a boldness and a courage commensurate with their knowledge, they were prepared to act a decided part.

Of the illustrious **congress of 1774, Mr. Paca was a member, in conjunction with Samuel Chase**, and several others. They were instructed by the Maryland convention, from which they received their appointment; "To effect one general plan of conduct, operating on the commercial connection of the colonies with the mother country, for the relief of Boston, and the preservation of American liberty." As a member of this congress, Mr. Paca so well pleased his constituents, that he was re-appointed to the same station, until the year 1778, at the close of which he retired.

Mr. Paca was an open advocate for a declaration of independence, as were several of his colleagues. For the accomplishment of such an object, they labored with unwearied zeal. A majority of the people of Maryland, however, were not prepared for such a measure. They still felt strong affection for the king, and the mother country, towards whom they expressed by their convention, early in the year 1776, many professions of loyalty and regard.

At the same time, they strictly enjoined their representatives in congress, not to consent to any propositions for publishing a declaration of independence, and accompanied these restrictions with a resolution, that Maryland would not be bound by any vote of congress, which should sanction such a measure.

In the life of Mr. Chase, we have related the manner in which a change was effected among the people in relation to this subject, particularly through the instrumentality of Mr. Chase. On the 28th of June, the convention of Maryland recalled their instructions to their delegates, whom they left free to vote in favor, of a declaration of independence. In consequence, their vote was given in its favor, shortly after which the convention expressed their approbation of the measure, and in support of it pledged their lives and fortunes and sacred honor.

Early in the year **1778, Mr. Paca was appointed chief justice of the supreme court** of his state, an office which he continued to exercise with great ability, until 1780, when he was advanced by congress to the still more important office of chief judge of the court of appeals, in prize and admiralty cases. In this new station, he acquitted himself with great honor. He entered with ability into the subject of international law, and had the happiness to learn that his decisions were highly approved, both at home and abroad.

**In 1782, he was elected to the chief magistracy** of his native state. Here, again, he was distinguished for great correctness and integrity, for dignity and simplicity. He entered with zeal into the interests of literature and religion, both of which he promoted by his private donations, and his executive patronage. These subjects he officially recommended to the general assembly in the following language "It is far from our intention," said he, "to embarrass your deliberations with a variety of objects; but we cannot pass over matters of so high concernment as religion and learning. The sufferings of the ministers of the gospel of all denominations, during the war, have been very considerable; and the perseverance and firmness of those who discharged their sacred functions under many discouraging circumstances, claim our acknowledgments and thanks. The bill of rights and form of government recognize the principle of public support for the ministers of the gospel, and ascertain the mode. Anxiously solicitous for the blessings of government, and the welfare and happiness of our citizens, and thoroughly convinced of the powerful influence of religion, when diffused by its respectable teachers, we beg leave most seriously and warmly to recommend, among the first objects of your attention on the return of peace, the making such provision as the constitution, in this case, authorizes and approves."

The recommendation of **Governor Paca** was kindly received by the assembly, which passed several acts in aid of the several denominations of Christians, which were at that time numerous in Maryland. The interest which he manifested in favor of religion, met the warm approbation of the various sects; and from the Episcopalians, in particular, it elicited, through their convention a formal expression of thanks.

After holding the office of chief magistrate for one year, Mr. Paca retired to private life, until 1760, when he again accepted the executive chair for a single year.

In 1789, on the organization of the federal government, he received from **President Washington the appointment of judge of the district court of the United States for Maryland**. This office he held until the year 1799, when he was summoned to another world, in the sixtieth year of his age.

**Mr. Paca was twice married.** The first time to a **daughter of Samuel Chew, in the year 1761**, while he was pursuing the study of law. The second time in 1777, to a daughter of a respectable gentleman of **Philadelphia, by the name of Harrison**. By the former lady he had five children, one of whom only survives. By the latter he had a son, who died shortly after his mother, whose decease occurred in 1780.

Few men in America, as may be gathered from the preceding sketch, were ever more estimable in their character than Governor Paca. He possessed a mind of superior order, which was greatly improved by his intercourse with mankind, and his extensive acquaintance with books.

In his address he was unusually graceful, and in his social powers was excelled by few. His attention to the young was not the least excellent trait in his character. He sought their company, and took a deep interest in their

moral and intellectual improvement. Even after he became governor of the state, he was in the habit of attending a club at Annapolis, composed of young men and gentlemen of science. In this school, many were trained, who afterwards became highly distinguished both as statesmen and lawyers. It was here that that celebrated orator, William Pinkney, first attracted the attention of **Judge Chase**, an account of whose particularly kind conduct towards him, we have given in the life of that gentleman. We shall only add to this notice of Mr. Paca, that as he lived a life of distinguished usefulness, so he died regretted by all who knew how to estimate moral worth, intellectual elevation, and political integrity.

**Source:** Rev. Charles A. Goodrich *Lives of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence*. New York: William Reed & Co., 1856. Pages 346-351. (Some minor spelling changes may have been made.)  
<http://colonialhall.com/paca/paca.php>

## **Mary Chew Paca 1736-1774 Wife of William Paca**

**Mary Chew**, who married **William Paca** in 1761, was the daughter of **Samuel Chew and Henrietta Lloyd**, and a direct descendant of **John Chew**, who arrived at **Jamestown in 1622**, with three servants, on the ship *Charitie*. **Of the young woman we have but little record except that she was the favourite granddaughter of Samuel Chew, head of one of the oldest and most prominent Colonial families.** In his *Historic Families of America*, Spooner says of the Chews: "They belong to that remarkable group of families which, founded in the Southern Colonies by ancestors of excellent birth and breeding, assumed at once a position of social and public consequence, and subsequent generations, by the merits and character of their members, as well as by influential alliances, steadily maintained and strengthened their original prestige."

**William Paca, at the time of his marriage, was a young lawyer** who had just reached his majority, and had been elected a member of the Provincial Assembly. His young wife did not long survive to enjoy the successes and triumphs that came to her husband during his honoured public career, in which he was member of Congress, Justice of the Supreme Court of his native State, and finally its Governor. **She died in the opening year of the Revolution. She was the mother of five children, only one of whom survived, according to Sanderson.** <sup>1</sup>

**This was a son, John P. Paca, who afterward married Juliana, daughter of Richard and Mary Tighlman.**

**In 1777, Mr. Paca married a second wife, Miss Anne Harrison**, a highly respected young woman of Philadelphia, who died three years later, leaving one child, which did not long survive her. **Governor Paca died in 1799** at his ancestral home, Wye Hall, Harford County.

**Source:** *Wives of the Signers: The Women Behind the Declaration of Independence*, by Harry Clinton Green and Mary Wolcott Green, A.B. (Aledo, TX: Wallbuilder Press, 1997). Originally Published in 1912 as volume 3 of *The Pioneer Mothers of America: A Record of the More Notable Women of the Early Days of the Country, and Particularly of the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons). Pages 219-220. (Some minor spelling changes may have been made.)

<sup>1</sup>[From pg. 281, n. 13] <sup>13</sup> In the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* it is stated that "One of **Governor Paca's daughters was married to Consul Roubelle**, a coadjutor of Napoleon. Their son bore such a striking likeness to the accepted ideals of our Saviour that he was often called upon to pose as a model." **Other authorities agree that John P. Paca was the only surviving child.** In her *Colonial Families*, Mary Burke Emory makes the statement that "**Mrs. William Paca's second husband was Daniel Dulaney**. They had two sons, Floyd, who was pierced with a sword in a duel with Rev. Bennett Allen, and Walter Dulaney." **All other authorities seem to agree that both of Governor Paca's wives died long before his decease.** ]

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