

Thomas Stone

1743-1787

Thomas Stone was the son of David Stone, of Pointon Manor, Charles County, Maryland. His father was a de-scendant of William Stone, who was governor of Maryland during the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. The boyhood of Thomas Stone was distinguished by an unusual fondness for learning. At the age of fifteen, having acquired a re-spectable knowledge of the English language, he obtained the reluctant consent of his father to enter the school of a Mr. Blaizedel, a Scotchman, for the purpose of pursuing the Greek and Latin languages. This school was at the distance of ten miles from his father's residence; yet, such was the zeal of young Stone, that he was in the habit of rising sufficiently early in tile morning, to traverse this distance on horseback, and enter the school at the usual time of its commencement.

On leaving the school of Mr. Blaizedel, the subject of our memoir was anxious to prosecute the study of law. But, although his father was a gentleman of fortune, his son was under the necessity of borrowing money to enable him to carry his laudable design into effect. He placed himself under the care of Thomas Johnson, a respectable lawyer of Annapolis. Having finished his preparatory studies, he entered upon the practice of his profession in Fredericktown, Maryland, where having resided two years, he removed to Charles county, in the same state.

During his residence in the former of these places, his business had enabled him to discharge the obligations under which he had laid himself for his education. At the age of twenty-eight, he married the daughter of Dr. Gustavus Brown, with whom he received the sum of one thousand pounds sterling. With this money, he purchased a farm, near the village of Port Tobacco, upon which he continued to reside during the revolutionary struggle.

The business of Mr. Stone, during a considerable part of that period, was not lucrative; and as the soil of the farm upon which he lived was poor, he found it difficult to obtain more than a competent livelihood. The expenses of his family were increased by the charge of four brothers, who were yet of tender years. The situation of many of our fathers, during those trying times, was similar to that of Mr. Stone. They had small patrimonies; business was in a great measure suspended; and, added to this, their time and talents wore imperiously demanded by their suffering country. Yet, amidst all these difficulties and trials, a pure patriotism continued to burn within their breasts, and enabled them most cheerfully to make any and every sacrifice to which they were called by the cause of freedom. Nor should it be forgotten, that in these sacrifices the families of our fathers joy-fully participated. They received without a murmur "the spoiling of their goods," being elevated by the reflection, that this was necessary for the achievement of that independence to which they considered themselves and their posterity as entitled.

Although Mr. Stone was a gentleman of acknowledged talents, and of inflexible and incorruptible integrity, it does not appear that he was brought forward into public life until some time in the year 1774. He was not a member of the illustrious Congress of that year, but receiving an appointment as a delegate in December, he took his seat in that body in the following May; and, for several years afterwards, was annually re-elected to the same dignified station.

In our biographical sketches of the other gentlemen who belonged about this time to the Maryland delegation, we have had frequent occasion to notice the loyalty and affection which

prevailed in that province, for several years, towards the king and the parent country; and hence the reluctance of her citizens to sanction the Declaration of Independence. When, therefore, towards the close of the year 1775, such a measure began seriously to be discussed in the country, the people of Maryland became alarmed; and, apprehensive lest their delegation in congress, which was composed generally of young men, should be disposed to favor the measure, the convention of that province attempted to restrain them by strict and specific instructions: "We instruct you," said they, "that you do not, without the previous knowledge and approbation of the convention of this province, assent to any proposition to declare these colonies independent of the crown of Great Britain, nor to any proposition for making or entering into an alliance with any foreign power; nor to any union or confederation of these colonies, which may necessarily lead to a separation from the mother country, unless in your judgments, or in the judgments of any four of you, or a majority of the whole of you, if all shall be then attending in Congress, it shall be thought absolutely necessary for the preservation of the liberties of the united colonies; and should a majority of the colonies in congress, against such your judgment, resolve to declare these colonies independent of the crown of Great Britain, or to make or enter into alliance with any foreign power, or into any union or confederation of these colonies, which may necessarily lead to a separation from the mother country, then we instruct you immediately to call the convention of this province, and repair thereto with such proposition and resolve, and lay the same before the said convention for their consideration; and this convention will not hold this province bound by such majority in congress, until the representative body of the province in convention assent thereto."

The cautious policy observable in these instructions, arose, not so much from timidity on the part of the people of Maryland, as from a sincere attachment to the royal government and an equally sincere affection to the parent country. Soon after, however, the aspect of things in this province began to change. The affections of the people became gradually weaned from Great Britain. It was apparent that a reunion with that country, on constitutional principles, though infinitely desirable, was not to be expected. By the fifteenth of May, 1776, these sentiments had become so strong, that a resolution passed the convention, declaring the authority of the crown at an end, and the necessity that each colony should form a constitution of government for itself.

In the latter part of June, the work of regeneration was accomplished. The people of Maryland generally expressed themselves, in courtly meetings, decidedly in favor of a Declaration of Independence. This expression of public sentiment proved irresistible, and convention proceeded to resolve: "That the instructions given to their deputies be recalled, and the restrictions therein contained, removed; and that the deputies of said colony, or any three or more of them, be authorized and empowered to concur with the other united colonies, or a majority of them, in declaring the united colonies free and independent states; in forming such further compact and confederation between them; in making foreign alliances; and in adopting such other measures as shall be adjudged necessary for securing the liberties of America; and that said colony will hold itself bound by the resolutions of the majority of the united colonies in the premises; provided the sole and exclusive right of regulating the internal government and police of that colony be reserved to the people thereof."

Being thus relieved from the trammels which had before bound them, Mr. Stone and his colleagues joyfully recorded their names in favor of a measure, which was connected with the imperishable glory of their country.

Soon after the declaration of independence, congress appointed a committee to prepare articles of confederation. To act on this committee, Mr. Stone was selected from the Maryland

delegation. The duty devolving upon them was exceedingly arduous. Their report of the plan of a confederation was before the house for a long period, and was the subject of debate thirty-nine times. Nor was it at length agreed to, till the fifteenth day of November, 1777. Although the people of Maryland had consented to a declaration of independence, after their first fervor had subsided, their former jealousy returned; and the Maryland convention proceeded to limit the powers of their delegates, as to the formation of the confederation. At the same time, not obscurely hinting in their resolution, that it might be still possible and certainly desirable, to accommodate the unhappy differences with Great Britain.

The above resolution was expressed in the following terms: "That the delegates, or any three or more of them, be authorized and empowered to concur with the other United States, or a majority of them, in forming a confederation, and in making foreign alliances, provided that such confederation, when formed, be not binding upon this state, without the assent of the general assembly; and the said delegates, or any three or more of them, are also authorized and empowered to concur in any measures, which may be resolved on by Congress for carrying on the war with Great Britain, and securing the liberties of the United States; reserving always to this state, the sole and exclusive right of regulating the internal police thereof. And the said delegates, or any three or more of them, are hereby authorized and empowered, notwithstanding any measure heretofore taken, to concur with the congress, or a majority of them, in accommodating our unhappy difference with Great Britain, on such terms as the congress, or a majority of them, shall think proper."

After seeing the confederation finally agreed upon in Congress, Mr. Stone declined a re-appointment to that body, but became a member of the Maryland legislature, where he powerfully contributed to meliorate the feelings of many, who were strongly opposed to the above plan of confederation. He had the pleasure, however, with other friends of that measure, to see it at length approved by the general assembly and the people generally.

Under this confederation, in 1783, he was again elected to a seat in Congress. In the session of 1784 he acted for some time as president pro tempore. On the breaking up of congress this year, he finally retired from that body, and again engaged actively in the duties of his profession. His practice now became lucrative in Annapolis, whither he had removed his residence; and in professional reputation he rose to great distinction. As an advocate, he excelled in strength of argument. He was often employed in cases of great difficulty; and by his brethren of the bar, it was thought eminently desirable, at such times, to have him for their colleague.

In 1787, Mr. Stone was called to experience an affliction which caused a deep and abiding melancholy to settle upon his spirits. This was the death of Mrs. Stone, to whom he was justly and most tenderly attached. During a long state of weakness and decline, induced by injudicious treatment on the occasion of her having the small pox by inoculation, Mr. Stone watched over her with the most unwearied devotion. At length, however, she sank to the grave. From this time, the health of Mr. Stone evidently declined. In the autumn of the same year his physicians advised him to make a sea voyage; and in obedience to that advice, he repaired to Alexandria, to embark for England. Before the vessel was ready to sail, however, he suddenly expired, on the fifth of October, 1787, in the forty-fifth year of his age.

Mr. Stone was a professor of religion, and distinguished for a sincere and fervent piety. To strangers, he had the appearance of austerity; but among his intimate friends, he was affable, cheerful, and familiar. In his disposition he was uncommonly amiable, and well disposed. In person, he was tall, but well proportioned.

Mr. Stone left one son and two daughters. The son died in 1793, while pursuing the study of law. One of the daughters, it is said, still lives, and is respectably married in the state Virginia.

Source: Rev. Charles A. Goodrich *Lives of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence*. New York: William Reed & Co., 1856. Pages 351-357. (Some minor spelling changes may have been made.)