

A look at South Carolina’s signers

The Post and Courier

In 1776, the Second Continental Congress gathered in Philadelphia to debate and ultimately declare the American colonies’ independence from Great Britain.

Of the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, four were from South Carolina: Thomas Heyward Jr., Thomas Lynch Jr., Arthur Middleton and Edward Rutledge.

Below is a brief biography of each.

Thomas Heyward Jr.

Born in St. Luke’s Parish, S.C., on July 28, 1746, Heyward was the son of Col. Daniel Heyward, a wealthy plantation



Heyward

owner. He received a classical education at home and continued in legal studies, which he completed in England. In 1775, he was elected to the Continental Congress, replacing John Rutledge after he was called home to assist in defending South Carolina against a British invasion. In 1778, Heyward returned home to serve as a judge of the criminal courts of the new government. He was captured by the British after commanding a battalion during the Siege of Charlestown in 1780. He was sent to St. Augustine, Fla., as a prisoner. Heyward returned to the bench following the war, before retiring in 1798. He died on March 6, 1809. He was 64.

Thomas Lynch Jr.

Born at Prince George’s, Winyah Parish, S.C., on Aug. 5, 1749. He received an education in England, graduating from the

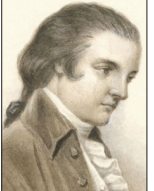


Lynch

University of Cambridge with honors. He studied law in London before returning home in 1772. He was commissioned a company commander in the First South Carolina regiment in 1775. Soon after, he was elected to the Continental Congress, replacing his ill father. Lynch Jr. also fell ill shortly after signing the Declaration and retired from Congress. He set out to return to South Carolina, but his father died on the way in Annapolis, Md. At the end of 1779, he and his wife sailed for the West Indies, with plans ultimately to go to the south of France. The ship disappeared. He would have been around 50.

Arthur Middleton

Born in South Carolina on June 26, 1742, at his family’s estate Middleton Place along the Ashley

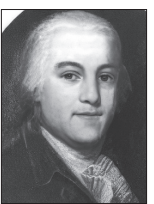


Middleton

River. He was educated in England and graduated from Cambridge in 1773. He was elected to the Council of Safety at Charleston in 1775, and in 1776 was elected as a delegate to the Continental Congress. The British captured him during the Siege of Charleston in 1780, and he was held prisoner for more than a year in Florida. After escaping to Philadelphia in 1781, he was appointed as a representative of Congress. Most of his fortune was destroyed during the Revolution, but he did continue in politics by serving in the state legislature. Middleton died on Jan. 1, 1787, at age 44.

Edward Rutledge

Born to an aristocratic family in Charles Town in November 1749, Rutledge was educated in law at Oxford and was admitted to the English Bar. He and



Rutledge

his brother, John, both attended the Continental Congress. Rutledge at the time was 27. He left Congress in November 1776 to join the defense of South Carolina. He was a member of the Charles Town Battalion of Artillery and rose to the rank of captain over the 2nd Independent Company. He returned to Congress in 1779 to fill a vacancy and left the following year when the British invaded South Carolina. He resumed his post as captain but was captured and held prisoner until July 1781. In 1782, he returned to the South Carolina legislature and served until 1796. He was intent on the prosecution of British Loyalists. He also served as an elector in 1788, 1792 and 1796, when, despite his allegiance to the Federalist party, he voted for Thomas Jefferson. He was twice elected to the state Senate and in 1798 was elected governor. He died on Jan. 23, 1800, at the age 51.

— Source: Carolana.com

THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY

Charleston-printed Declaration of Independence returns home

BY MEGAN FERNANDE
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CHARLESTON — The only known surviving copy of the Declaration of Independence printed south of Philadelphia is back in Charleston, where a patriot printer once risked everything to distribute it.

As news of the declaration spread like fire throughout the colonies in the summer of 1776, it was Peter Timothy who circulated the document in Charlestown, as the city then was known.

Although the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence in early July, the news took weeks to reach South Carolina as the Royal Navy remained stationed off the coast after its lashing at the Battle of Sullivan’s Island. Travel by boat from Philadelphia typically took 10 to 14 days, but ships could not easily enter Charleston Harbor with British forces nearby. Copies were rushed to the colonies by couriers on horseback, which took about a month to get to Charleston.

Once Timothy was delivered a copy, he rushed to fire up his press in early August 1776 to print broadsheets with the original text. His printing press had been dismantled and relocated ahead of the British attack, as he feared it would be confiscated should they take the city.

The only known surviving broadsheet printed by the Timothy family is on display at The Charleston Museum for the summer.

Museum director Carl Borick said the victory at Sullivan’s Island on June 28, 1776 — a week before the declaration was adopted — was a pivot point in shifting public opinion that patriots could turn the tide in the fledgling war.

“When news of the declaration reaches Charleston, it is easier to be excited about on the heels of a victory,” Borick said.

That was the moment people started to believe the patriots stood a chance — because the battle at the coast was “proof the British could be beaten and South Carolina could exist as an independent state,” Borick said.

Timothy signed his name in support of the declaration by stamping “CHARLESTOWN, Printed by PETER TIMOTHY” at the bottom of the broadsheet.

“When signers of the declaration put their names on the document, they were committing treason against the crown,” Borick said. “Peter Timothy is in the same category by printing these broadsheets to get the word out about the declaration.”

Borick said that while it may be hard to imagine comparing Charleston today to cities like Boston, New York or Philadelphia, it was the fourth-largest city in the 13 colonies at that time. It was also the wealthiest.

“When the Revolutionary War breaks out, we are a key player,” Borick said. “We are the most important port and city in the southern colonies. And we are definitely on par with those three cities from a political and economic standpoint.”

Elizabeth Gay, executive director of The Huguenot Society of South Carolina, said she learned of the existing broadsheet — which is owned by a New York nonprofit organization dedicated to improving American history education — while researching Huguenot connections to the revolution. She said Timothy was a key figure in the struggle for independence, even though his story is not as well known as those of other Huguenot descendants, including Francis Marion and Andrew Pickens.

“We knew we had to bring (the broadsheet) back to Charleston for the 250th anniversary,” Gay said. “It helps us tell the story of Peter Timothy and generations of the Timothy family for their overlooked role in the rebellion against the Crown.”

Legacy inked by freedom

A historical marker at 100 King St. memorializes the print shop and the family’s printing legacy — which started with Louis Timothée (later changed to Lewis Timothy), Peter Timothy’s father.

Lewis Timothy and his wife were Huguenot refugees who left Amsterdam for Philadelphia, where he met Benjamin Franklin and became a journeyman printer.

Franklin sent him to Charleston in 1734



GRACE BEAHM ALFORD/STAFF

Curator Jennifer McCormick with The Charleston Museum places the broadside Charleston-printed Declaration of Independence by Peter Timothy in its display Friday, May 29, 2026. It is the only known surviving copy of the Declaration of Independence printed in Charleston in 1776.

to publish the South-Carolina Gazette after its previous publisher died.

Lewis Timothy died in 1738. His wife, Elizabeth, assumed control of the printing operation until their son Peter turned 21. She is now recognized as America’s first female newspaper editor and publisher. She is inducted in both the S.C. Press Association and S.C. Business halls of fame.

Peter Timothy wasn’t just a printer. He was also widely known as a journalist and is also enshrined in the S.C. Press Association Hall of Fame. He was a founding member of the Charleston Library Society, which later became the foundation for The Charleston Museum. He also was elected to the South Carolina Assembly and was the first Provincial Post-Master of South Carolina.

Because he was in charge of one of the most-influential newspapers in the colonies, Timothy used his reputation to lend credibility and support to the patriot movement. In addition to printing the newspaper, his shop produced documents, handbills, pamphlets and other items for the patriot cause.

“As an official printer of the provincial government, Peter Timothy was entrusted with distributing the news,” Gay said.

Four years after the declaration, when the Siege of Charleston took place, Timothy was posted high in the steeple of St. Michael’s Church — a spot he used frequently — to record British movements throughout the harbor and city. He wrote the account for Henry Laurens, who was in Philadelphia representing South Carolina in the Continental Congress. The paper is in the South Carolina Historical Society records.

Timothy’s patriotism ultimately cost him his freedom.

When Charleston fell under British control in 1780, he was arrested for treason to the Crown. He spent time on a British prisoner-of-war ship before being sent to a prison in St. Augustine, Fla. His family was exiled to Philadelphia. After the war, Timothy was sailing to Antigua when he was lost at sea, according to the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

His wife, Ann Donovan Timothy, returned to Charleston after his death and resumed publication of the newspaper and printing operations in July 1783 on Broad Street. Just like her mother-in-law, she did so until her son Benjamin Franklin Timothy, named after his godfather, became of age.

Gay said that many Huguenot patriots who fought in the American Revolution had grown up hearing stories of the religious persecution families experienced in France, their loss of rights and ability to practice their faith.

“That is thought to have largely influenced how Huguenots responded to the rise of the revolutionary spirit that came out of not just Carolina but everywhere,” Gay said.

She believes it could have left an imprint on not just Peter Timothy, but others like him.

“Behind this one document is a generational story that extends beyond the Timothy family — a story of what refugees who fled for their lives by coming to the New World could achieve,” Gay said. “They had already known the misery of oppression, loss of rights and religious freedom, yet they did remarkable things to build this new nation.”

The family also has a foundational connection to what is The Post and Courier today.

Peter and Ann Timothy’s grandson published The Charleston Courier from 1806 to 1808. While this was the end of the Timothy family’s involvement in newspapers, the paper they helped found later merged with Charleston News in 1873 to form The News and Courier and through another merger more than a century later, The Post and Courier.

On display

The declaration is the centerpiece of the “Ringleaders of Rebellion: Charleston in Revolt, 1775–1783” exhibit at The Charleston Museum. It is on loan from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and will be on view through Aug. 30.

The museum’s newest exhibit focuses on the Revolutionary War and Charleston’s role — from the Battle of Sullivan’s Island to the siege and British occupation. The exhibit is on display through Sept. 20.

The history of Charleston’s connections to America’s founding piece of parchment is being well celebrated during the 250th anniversary year.

There again will be a public reading of the Declaration of Independence on the steps of the historic Old Exchange Building at 9 a.m. July 4 — a yearly tradition for more than a decade. The Old Exchange building was one of three locations where the declaration was read aloud to Charleston residents in 1776.

The Charleston Library Society, which is the oldest cultural institution in the South being founded in 1748, is home to a rare copy of Robert Mills’ The South Carolina and American General Gazette newspaper dated 1776. It was the only newspaper in the state to print the entire Declaration of Independence, according to the Library Society’s website. It also is on display at the library on King Street.

The former home of declaration signer Arthur Middleton recently opened a new exhibition, “Conversations of Freedom: The American Revolution at Middleton Place,” which features a rare silk edition of the Declaration of Independence. It’s one of only four known to still exist. The commemorative print was created in 1818 by New York-based printer Benjamin Owen Tyler and stenography expert Peter Maverick as a way for the public to honor America’s founding fathers. The prints were viewed as high-status collectibles that showed patriotism for the nation’s founding and were meant to instill a sense of optimism in the wake of the War of 1812.

1776 printing of Declaration preserved by Charleston Library Society and Post and Courier Foundation

Staff reports

The Charleston Library Society, the oldest cultural institution in the South, is home to an original 1776 edition of a local newspaper that was the only publication in South Carolina to print the text of the Declaration of Independence.

The South Carolina and American General Gazette, in its weekly edition for Aug. 2-14, 1776, carried news in Charleston of the declaration’s public proclamation and printed its entire contents in its weekly four-page

edition. The paper would have started the presses the day the founding document made it to the Holy City after being adopted on July 4 in Philadelphia.

The rare periodical was acquired at auction in 2000 by The Post and Courier Foundation for \$140,000. The foundation finally took possession of the document in 2001 after some legal claims about its ownership. It is on permanent loan to the Library Society, which was founded in 1748 — nearly three decades before the American Revolution.

The original copy of the 1776 newspaper has been largely stored in a vault to preserve it, only to be brought out for special public displays. This year is such a time, with the observance of the 250th anniversary of the country’s Declaration of Independence and the newspaper’s publishing of its text. The framed document is on public display at the Charleston Library Society, 164 King St.

The journey of the surviving edition of the Gazette back to Charleston began more than a quarter century ago, when a Vir-

ginia rare-newspaper dealer and appraiser put it on the auction block at Christie’s in New York. Word of the paper’s existence and sale reached The Post and Courier Foundation, a separate, nonprofit established by the newspaper.

The South Carolina and American General Gazette was published by Robert Wells. At the time, it was one of three papers printed in Charleston. It has no connection to The Post and Courier, which dates from the Charleston Courier that first published in 1803.