Written In Stone

By Sherry Johnston

Declaration Signers

The 4th of July has been celebrated in America every year since 1777. It's a happy summer holiday for Americans—parades, picnics & cook-outs, flag waving and fireworks—a time for family and friends. The Fourth of July or Independence Day is the birth of America as a free and independent nation. By observing the birthday of our country, we are celebrating the freedoms that our founding fathers believed in.

Who were some of those founding fathers, and where were they born or buried? What kind of cemeteries are they laid to rest in—are they taken care of or are they neglected? The Committee of Five who were assigned the important task of putting together this important legislation which would forever change our lives, for generations to come, are listed as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston, and Roger Sherman.

Thomas Jefferson was born in April of 1743. Shortly before his death, he told his friend, James Madison that he wished to be remembered for two things only: as the Author of the Declaration of Independence, and as the founder of the University of VA. He died on the 4th of July, as the nation celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his splendid Declaration. He is buried at his estate, Monticello, in Charlottesville, VA.

John Adams, born 30 Oct 1735 in Braintree MA, is considered to be one of the most important 'founding fathers' of all. Without him, we would have had no push for independence. He staunchly defended the rights of ALL Americans, regardless of race or creed. He died the same day as Thomas Jefferson, and is entombed beneath the ground floor of the United First Parish Church in Quincy, MA. He died on 4 July 1826.

Benjamin Franklin was born in Jan 1706, Boston MA, and he's been quoted many times in the ranks of cemetery preservationists everywhere. His most famous quote is 'show me your cemeteries and I will tell you the kind of people you have' Benjamin Franklin died 17 April 1790 and is buried at Christ Church Burial Ground in Philadelphia, PA along with four other signers of the Declaration.

Robert R. Livingston was born 27 Nov 1746 in New York City, and though he was named to the original committee to draft the Declaration, he was recalled by his state before he could sign it. A friend of Napoleon Bonaparte, he died in Feb of 1813 and is buried in St. Paul's Churchyard in Tivoli NY.

Roger Sherman was born in April of 1721, in Newton MA. He was a cobbler by trade and many times found reading a book, studying as he worked. He is known for signing four important pieces of American history: Articles of Association, Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. He died 23 July 1793, and is buried in the Grove Street Cemetery at Yale, the first chartered burial ground in the US.

What about John Hancock, one of the most important signatures on the Declaration? He was born in Jan 1737, died in Oct of 1793 and is buried at Granbury Burying Ground, Boston, MA. The boldness of his signature has made it live in American minds as a perfect expression of the strength and freedom — and defiance — of the individual in the face of British tyranny.