

39.1 Richard Stockton, A Fruitful Founder

Our “Founding Fathers” were heroes. We know some of them better than others. The names George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin are familiar to us. After all, their images are on our money.

Some other Founders and Framers are not so well-known. I believe that losing that knowledge is by design. There was a time in our history when school children knew the names and stories of those early heroes. They knew the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence. We have forgotten most of those men today. If we remove the stories of our early Patriots from our history books, we will also forget the things they held dear. If we have forgotten where we have been, we won’t know where to go. Our historical amnesia affects life, liberty, faith, honor, and sacrifice.

February 28 is the anniversary of the death of Richard Stockton. You may have heard of him, but most likely, you have not. He is one of our lesser-known Patriot Founders. In this podcast, I give you an ever so brief synopsis of his life. As you think about this man, consider the fruit of his life. Jesus said in Matthew 7:20 (NKJV) that we can determine the character of a person by the fruit in their life. He said, “²⁰Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”

Mr. Stockton graduated from Princeton University and became a successful attorney and judge. He taught law to some of the men who would be distinguished leaders in the birth of our Republic. Among these were:

- Elias Boudinot – A President of Congress and Framers of the Bill of Rights
- William Paterson – Signed the Constitution and was appointed to the Supreme Court by President George Washington
- Joseph Reed – A General in the American Revolution and Governor of Pennsylvania
- He actively recruited John Witherspoon to be President of Princeton; he later signed the Declaration of Independence along with Stockton¹

The British invaded New Jersey after the fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. The invasion forced Stockton to move his family to safety. Some of his neighbors betrayed him to the British.

British soldiers dragged him from his bed in the middle of the night and imprisoned him in New York. The British mounted a series of atrocities against Stockton. These included:

- Pillaging his farm
- Burning his library, which was one of the best in the country (the Nazis were not the first to burn books)
- Torturing and abusing him physically and emotionally²

Congress arranged his release through a prisoner exchange. Stockton’s imprisonment took its toll on him, however. He died on February 28, 1781, at the age of fifty-one.³

I am sure you remember the last line of the Declaration of Independence. It reads:

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

¹ Cummings, Brad, and Lance Wubbels, editors. *The Founders' Bible*. Newbury Park, CA, Shiloh Road Publishers, 2012, p. 1920.

² Federer, William J. *American Minute*. St. Louis, Amerisearch, Inc., 2012, p. 65.

³ Lossing, B J. *Biographical Sketches of the Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence*. New York, George F. Cooledge & Brother, 1848 (reprinted, 2004), p. 80.

Richard Stockton sacrificed his life and fortune for the cause of liberty. He kept his sacred honor to this day. His story does not end with his death; he bore fruit in his death and after.

Mr. Stockton impacted his heirs in his “last will and testament.” In those days, such a document declared one’s last will and “testimony.” In it, he stated:

As my children will have frequent occasion of perusing this instrument, and probably be particularly impressed with the last words of their father. I think it proper here not only to subscribe to the entire belief of the great and leading doctrines of the Christian religion, such as the being of God; the universal defection and depravity of human nature; the Divinity of the person and the completeness of the redemption purchased by the blessed Savior; the necessity of the operations of the Divine Spirit; of Divine faith accompanied with an habitual virtuous life; and the universality of the Divine Providence: but also, in the bowels of a father’s affection, to exhort and charge [my children] that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, that the way of life held up in the Christian system is calculated for the most complete happiness that can be enjoyed in this mortal state, [and] that all occasions of vice and immorality is injurious either immediately or consequentially~~even in this life.⁴

Navy Commodore Robert Stockton was Richard’s grandson. He helped the formerly enslaved people to establish the free nation of Liberia. He was instrumental in capturing California. Stockton, California, was named for him.⁵

Richard Stockton had significant family connections. His brother-in-law, Elias Boudinot, was a Continental Congress President and founder of the American Bible Society. His daughter married Benjamin Rush, whom John Adams believed to be one of the three most influential Founders.⁶

When I think of men like Richard Stockton, their sense of sacrifice and duty regarding our liberty moves me. The same spirit is rising all over the earth today. Canadian Truckers have responded to the despot Trudeau with the same spirit of sacrifice. That spirit for liberty comes from the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:17 (NKJV) reads:

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

Richard Stockton bore lasting fruit in his personal and political lives. He is worthy of our investigation and imitation.

Keep The Light of *Bearing Fruit* Burning!

⁴ Founders’ Bible, p. 1613.

⁵ Federer, p. 65.

⁶ Founders’ Bible, p. 249.