

The Untold Story: The Extravagant Life of Charles Carroll, One of the Most Fascinating Founders

Imagine a life filled with lavish parties, grand estates, and influential connections, all in the midst of the American Revolution. While names like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson often dominate the narrative of the Founding Fathers, the story of Charles Carroll remains one of the most intriguing and enigmatic tales of the era. Join us as we dive into the extraordinary life of Charles Carroll, a man who defied all odds and left an indelible mark on American history.

A Prominent Family and Tumultuous Beginnings

Charles Carroll was born on September 19, 1737, into a wealthy Catholic family in Annapolis, Maryland. His father, Charles Carroll Sr., was a successful lawyer and planter, providing young Charles with an upbringing filled with privilege and opportunity. However, due to the prevailing discriminatory laws against Catholics, his family's status didn't come without its challenges.

As the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence, Charles Carroll faced constant prejudice and discrimination throughout his life. Many doubted his loyalty to the revolutionary cause because of his faith, leading him to fight relentlessly for religious freedom and equality.

American Cicero: The Life of Charles Carroll (Lives of the Founders Book 4)

by Bradley J. Birzer (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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Education and The Journey Abroad

To seek a world-class education and broaden his horizons, Carroll traveled to France and attended the prestigious College Louis le Grand in Paris. During his time in Europe, he developed close relationships with influential figures such as Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, who would later become instrumental in shaping America's future.

Carroll's travels across Europe not only exposed him to radical political ideas but also allowed him to witness the opulent courts of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. These experiences would later influence his perspective on democracy, aristocracy, and the structures of power.

Revolutionary Involvement and the Signer of the Declaration

Upon returning to America, Carroll dedicated himself fully to the revolutionary cause. His eloquence and intelligence made him a persuasive advocate for the principles of liberty and independence. In 1776, at the age of 38, Carroll was chosen to represent Maryland at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, where he proudly put his signature on the Declaration of Independence.

Despite his significant contribution, Charles Carroll's signature on the document is often overshadowed by the more recognizable names. However, his efforts were paramount to securing the support of the Catholic community and garnering their loyalty to the revolutionary cause, proving his unquestionable dedication to freedom and justice.

A Visionary and Philanthropist

Beyond his involvement in politics, Charles Carroll was also a visionary and philanthropist. He played a pivotal role in the development of the Erie Canal, one of the most significant engineering achievements of the 19th century. He recognized the canal's potential economic impact, connecting the western territories to the East Coast and transforming New York City into a global trade hub.

Charles Carroll's interest in improving society extended to various philanthropic endeavors. He believed in the transformative power of education and donated generously to create schools, colleges, and public libraries. His contributions laid the groundwork for future generations' access to knowledge and intellectual growth.

An Exquisite Lifestyle and Mark of Legacy

As one of the wealthiest men in America, Charles Carroll led a life of luxury and extravagance. He owned numerous estates, including the lavish "Carrollton Manor" in Maryland, which covered more than 80,000 acres of land.

Carroll's influence extended beyond his wealth, as he was a prominent figure in society. His opulent parties were known for their grandeur and lavishness, often attended by high-ranking officials and influential intellectuals.

Although his life mirrored that of an elite aristocrat, Charles Carroll actively fought against inherited privileges and inequality. He advocated for an inclusive society where all individuals, regardless of their social background or religious affiliation, could thrive.

A Living Testament to the Founding Principles

Charles Carroll lived an extraordinary life that embodied the essence of the founding principles of the United States. He overcame religious persecution, fought for equal rights, and left an indelible mark on politics, infrastructure, and education.

While his name might not be as recognizable as some of his counterparts, Charles Carroll's contributions to the American Revolution and his relentless pursuit of freedom make him one of the most fascinating and inspiring figures in American history.

So, let us remember the name - Charles Carroll - and celebrate the life of an individual who defied expectations and played an instrumental role in shaping the very fabric of our nation.



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Aristocrat. Catholic. Patriot. Founder.

Before his death in 1832, Charles Carroll of Carrollton—the last living signer of the Declaration of Independence—was widely regarded as one of the most important Founders. Today, Carroll’s signal contributions to the American Founding are overlooked, but the fascinating new biography *American Cicero* rescues Carroll from unjust neglect.

Drawing on his considerable study of Carroll’s published and unpublished writings, historian Bradley J. Birzer masterfully captures a man of supreme intellect, imagination, integrity, and accomplishment. Born a bastard, Carroll nonetheless became the best educated (and wealthiest) Founder. The Marylander’s insight, Birzer shows, allowed him to recognize the necessity of independence from Great Britain well before most other Founders. Indeed, Carroll’s analysis of the situation in the colonies in the run-up to the Revolution was original and brilliant—yet almost all historians have ignored it. Reflecting his classical and liberal education, the man who would be called “The Last of the Romans” advocated a proper understanding of the American Revolution as deeply rooted in the Western tradition. Carroll even left his mark on the U.S. Constitution despite not assuming his elected position to the Constitutional Convention: by inspiring the creation of the U.S. Senate.

American Cicero ably demonstrates how Carroll’s Catholicism was integral to his thought. Oppressed because of his faith—Maryland was the most anti-Catholic of the original thirteen colonies—Carroll became the only Roman Catholic to sign

the Declaration of Independence and helped legitimize Catholicism in the young American republic.

What's more, Birzer brilliantly reassesses the most controversial aspects of Charles Carroll: his aristocratic position and his critiques of democracy. As Birzer shows, Carroll's fears of extreme democracy had ancient and noble roots, and his arguments about the dangers of democracy influenced Alexis de Tocqueville's magisterial work *Democracy in America*.

American Cicero reveals why Founders such as John Adams assumed that Charles Carroll would one day be considered among the greats—and also why history has largely forgotten him.



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