

1776 Roles



Note that all congressional roles will be portrayed as men, but women may be considered for some of these roles if willing to cross-dress and sing in the appropriate vocal range.

Producer's note: Please remember that these historical figures were all men who were passionate about their lives and the country they were helping to create. There are no villains here; no good or bad individuals; only men trying to unite their passions and convictions into one vision. The fact that they were able to accomplish just that is an astounding testament to their determination and perseverance. You, as actors, are here to tell their stories.

John Adams – Massachusetts

age: 40 vocal range: C3-F#4 solos/duets/small & large group songs

Adams is known for being one of the driving forces behind the push for independence from Britain. Often blunt, seldom patient with others' shortcomings and prone to fiery outbursts, he was strong-willed and single-mindedly passionate for the cause for independence. He had a keen sense of what was just and stood resolutely behind those ideals. He was known as an indefatigable master of compromise and debate—but also for his impatience. He was a fierce advocate for the Declaration of Independence drafted by Thomas Jefferson, even though the two men often did not see eye-to-eye.

Abigail Adams – at home in Massachusetts

age: 31 vocal range: Db4-F5 solo sung lines/duets

Abigail was the loving and witty wife of John Adams. She was well-read and persuasive with a pen (especially when it came to John, as their letters attest.) She is thought by many to be the intellectual equal of her well-educated husband. A tireless supporter of her husband, she also took on the role of "Devil's Advocate" in their discussions to push him to see all sides of an issue.

Benjamin Franklin – Pennsylvania

age: 70 vocal range: Ab2-Eb4 solo sung lines/small & large group songs

Saying Benjamin Franklin was a man of many interests and abilities is an understatement! He was a true American "polymath": an author, printer, inventor, humorist, scientist, politician, and diplomat. Intelligent and witty; pleasant, yet cunning; he was well-liked by most. Adept at "quiet deal making" and compromise in Congress, he was persuasive and congenial. He was perhaps the most influential individual in forming the type of society America would become.

Thomas Jefferson – Virginia

age: 33 vocal range: C3-G4 solo sung lines/small & large group songs

Jefferson's political involvement with the revolution began when he was just 26 years old. He was never a vocal member, but an intelligent and introspective young man who was passionate about politics and love. Eloquent with a pen, he concentrated his efforts on committee work and writing

Martha Jefferson – wife of Thomas Jefferson

age: 27 vocal range: Bb3—D5 solo

Martha Jefferson was charming, quick-witted, and very much in love with her husband. Well-read and well-educated, she was a talented musician. She was a radiant southern belle with an appealing sense of humor, but a vivacious temper, and reportedly able to hold her own in conversation.

John Dickinson – Pennsylvania

age: 43 vocal range: A2-E4 solo/large group songs

A “northern gentleman” and commanding, take-charge kind of leader of men, John Dickinson was opposed to independence throughout his impressive political career. He was instead in favor of reconciliation with Britain and felt the dispute to be mainly with Parliament. Known for his integrity, he became the leading conservative voice. He particularly resented the tactics of New England leaders, but continued to work for peace. He was known to be a man not to be pushed into actions he could not fully commit to. He voted against the Declaration of Independence and refused to sign it. Nevertheless, he entered the military during the Revolutionary War in defense of his homeland, a patriot still of strong convictions.

John Hancock – Massachusetts – president of Congress

age: 39 vocal range: solo sung lines/large group songs

John Hancock was said to hold the greatest body of wealth in New England. Alongside his friend, John Adams, Hancock became a hero of the patriotic movement as the president of Congress in 1776 and oversaw the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Legend has it that he signed his name large so that “King George could read it without his glasses”—but it is only a legend.

Edward Rutledge – South Carolina

age: 26 vocal range: C3-A4 solo/large group songs

Rutledge is a fervent young southern gentleman, not anxious to have his way of life pulled out from under him. He is a natural leader yet keeps his passions under tight control. During the Second Continental Congress, he led the moderates in delaying Richard Henry Lee’s proposal on national independence, even though he believed separation was inevitable. He wanted to delay, however, until the colonies established a strong confederation and nurtured foreign allegiances. Realizing the resolution would be carried with or without his colony’s support, he convinced his fellow delegates to reverse their position for the sake of unanimity.

Richard Henry Lee – Virginia

age: 44 vocal range: C3-G4 solo/large group songs

Born to a politically active Southern aristocratic “first family” in Virginia, Richard Henry Lee attended private school in England, returning to Virginia in 1751 during the French and Indian War. He was elected to the First Continental Congress, where he was praised for his oratory skills. He offered the resolution for independence in June 1776 during the 2nd Continental Congress. He was an enthusiastic patriot with a passion for life, his home and family, and the possibility of freedom from England.

Charles Thomson - Secretary of Congress

age: 46 vocal range: solo sung lines/large group songs

Irish immigrant, Charles Thomson became Pennsylvania’s most powerful protest organizer. Thomson was made secretary of the Continental Congress at its first meeting in 1774. When he retired from public life he occupied himself by using the notes he took as secretary as the basis of a history of the revolution. He destroyed the manuscript before his death, however, fearing his depiction of the unpatriotic conduct of some colonists would give pain to their descendants.

Stephen Hopkins – Rhode Island

age: 69 vocal range: C3-Eb4 large group songs

From a prominent Rhode Island family, farmer Stephen Hopkins was a serious student of science, mathematics, and literature. He criticized the British taxation and recommended colonial home rule. Hopkins authored a bill prohibiting the importation of slaves into Rhode Island—one of the earliest anti-slavery laws in the country. Second-oldest signatory of the Declaration, he suffered from palsy in his hands and is reputed to have said of his tremulous signature, “My hand trembles, but my heart does not!” Although his nickname in 1776 is “Old Grape and Guts,” Adams said Hopkins never drank to excess, but inspired us all.” Described by one friend as a self-taught genius and another as “a man of noble fortitude & resolution and a glorious Patriot.”

Robert Livingston – New York

age: 35 vocal range: Bb2-F4 solo sung lines/small & large group songs

Livingston, a lawyer from a large and prominent New York family, was on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. Uncertainty surrounds why he was selected for this duty, but it may have been in part the desire to have “the powerful Livingston family committed to this irrevocable step.” Robert, a gracious man with a strong sense of responsibility to his large family, was called home before he could sign the Declaration, but his brother, Philip, did sign it.

Lewis Morris – New York

age: 50 vocal range: large group songs

A farmer in a pro-Loyalist county of New York, Lewis Morris became increasingly critical of Britain. In Congress, he served on committees including one for the defense of New York. The colony’s delegates were not authorized to vote for or against independence. Morris, however, traveled to Philadelphia to sign the Declaration.

Samuel Chase – Maryland

age: 35 vocal range: solo sung lines/large group songs

Early in his career as a lawyer in Annapolis, Maryland, Samuel Chase became involved with the Sons of Liberty, protesting (sometimes violently) against the Stamp Act. He journeyed to Montreal to try to negotiate a union with Canada in 1776. When he returned to Congress from that failed venture in June 1776, he discovered that his colony did not yet support Lee’s resolution on independence, so during the resolution’s postponement he rushed home and spent two weeks campaigning for the cause. On July 1, Maryland voted for separation from Britain.

Thomas McKean – Delaware

age: 42 vocal range: large group songs (*Scottish brogue on spoken lines preferred.*)

Col. Thomas McKean was of Scottish descent and showed it in his feisty, but likeable and charming demeanor. A basically down-to-earth man, he devoted his life to political engagement, holding numerous offices across three colonies during his long career. When the Second Continental Congress voted on independence in 1776, McKean was responsible for breaking the Delaware tie. On July 1, when the first vote took place, McKean and George Read were deadlocked. McKean sent an urgent dispatch to fellow delegate Caesar Rodney, who was away on military matters. Rodney rushed to Philadelphia to cast his vote for independence.

Caesar Rodney – Delaware

age: 47 vocal range: large group songs

Caesar Rodney was a leading patriot in his colony. He was bothered by a cancerous growth on his face, which he covered with a green silk veil, but that is not why he was absent for the initial vote on independence, as 1776 suggests. In June 1776, as brigadier general of his colony’s militia, Rodney was investigating Loyalist agitations in Sussex County, Delaware. Upon receiving a letter from Thomas McKean on July 1 informing him that George Read had voted against independence, Rodney rode 80 miles through a thunderstorm to Philadelphia to ensure his colony’s support of independence

Judge James Wilson – Pennsylvania

age: 42 vocal range: large group songs

James Wilson emigrated to the American colonies from Scotland. He studied law under John Dickinson before moving to Pennsylvania and seemed to be overshadowed by him. He argued that Parliament had no authority to pass laws for the colonies—but did not go so far as to deny colonial allegiance to the Crown. In the Continental Congress, he called for separation from Britain, but Pennsylvania was divided on the issue. An honest, meek, and thoughtful man, he did not seek out notoriety.

Roger Sherman – Connecticut

age: 35 vocal range: C3-Bb4 solo sung lines/small & large group songs

Roger Sherman was indeed a cobbler early in life before becoming a lawyer, judge, and politician. Although opposed to extremism, Sherman joined the fight against Britain, supporting nonimportation measures. He was known for his pragmatism and principles, serving on numerous committees, including the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. Sherman was a simple man trying to do what he could for the cause and his country.

George Read – Delaware

age: 42 vocal range: large group songs

Was a successful lawyer in Delaware, although not a great orator. He was well thought of for his moral fiber, personal integrity, and impartial decisions in court. Like his friend John Dickinson, Read was interested in protecting colonial rights but was wary of extremism and believed reconciliation with England was desirable and possible

Dr. Lyman Hall – Georgia

age: 52 vocal range: large group songs

New England clergyman and doctor Lyman Hall established a medical practice in a settlement of New England Puritans on the Georgia coast. The allegiance of the residents of St. John's Parish to New England set them apart from the rest of the colony when trouble with Great Britain erupted. Hall and his band of outspoken revolutionaries were unpopular with the ruling Georgia aristocracy who at first refused to send delegates to Congress but agreed after Hall's parish decided to send Hall to Philadelphia independently.

Dr. Josiah Bartlett – New Hampshire

age: 46 vocal range: large group songs

Dr. Josiah Bartlett was a well-reputed physician in New Hampshire, when he became involved in politics. He was an active advocate against British oppression. He voted for separation from Great Britain and was the second signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

Joseph Hewes – North Carolina

age: 46 vocal range: large group songs

A businessman who amassed a fortune with his shipping business and a tireless worker in committee, he became the leading expert on maritime concerns for the Congress. Hewes initially opposed separation from Great Britain. Despite instructions from the colonial Assembly to vote for independence should it be proposed, Hewes opposed Richard Henry Lee's June 7 independence resolution. Only during the ensuing debate did he finally come around.

Rev. John Witherspoon – New Jersey

age: 53 vocal range: large group songs

Originally immigrated from Scotland to serve as the first president of what would become Princeton University. A scholar and a gentleman of the cloth, but with strong convictions in favor of Independence.

Andrew McNair – Custodian/Bell Ringer

age: unknown (between late 30's & 60) vocal range: Small group / large group songs

The official bell ringer and general custodian for Congress; at times "crotchety", but a dedicated and hard-working individual, proud of his affiliation with Congress and her patriots. Mostly respectful of the delegates, but out-spoken when given the opportunity. Beyond ringing the Liberty Bell, his responsibilities also included making fires, lighting and extinguishing candles, and keeping the meeting room of the Pennsylvania State House, where Congress met, clean.

Military Courier

age: 15 – 20 Vocal Range: C3-Db4 Solo song

The message runner between General Washington's army and the Continental Congress. He has witnessed the hardships of war firsthand, although his innocent disposition and appearance may imply otherwise.