

My Name Is Charles Carroll of Carrollton

My Grandfather, Charles Carroll the Settler, came to our land from Ireland in 1688 to escape virulent persecution of the Irish Catholics by the Church of England. Maryland was originally named for Henrietta Maria, the Queen and wife of Charles I of England, and was settled by Catholics.

For a time, Maryland was the most tolerant of the colonies...in fact the legislature had passed an official "Toleration Act" in 1649. So Grandfather Charles had every right to expect the freedom to practice his fervent beliefs. As fate would have it, shortly after he came here, resulting from the "Glorious Revolution" of England, Catholics were disenfranchised, prohibited from holding office of any kind. The Settler was actually imprisoned for a time because of his refusal to renounce his faith. Nevertheless, my ancestor was a shrewd man and married well. Even with punitive laws being enacted against Catholics all the time, he managed to acquire and maintain a fortune in land and slaves.

My father, "Papa," Charles Carroll of Annapolis extended the family fortune until, in 1737, the year of my birth, I became by inheritance a very wealthy Catholic baby indeed.

While being a Catholic was still a considerable social detriment, my father nevertheless sent me to be educated properly at the Jesuit school in Maryland. As Protestant laws of intolerance towards Catholics progressed, I was sent to Europe to continue my education. I studied law at Jesuit colleges in France and at the Inner Temple in London, returning to Maryland in 1765 following my mother's death.

My convictions that the colonies were being taxed unfairly began shortly thereafter when I began to write articles in the Maryland Gazette under the pseudonym of "First Citizen." I claimed that various "fees" being levied by the government were, in fact, taxes, and should not be required unless by consent of the people. My adversary, Daniel Dulaney a prominent jurist, defended this heinous abuse of power in the same newspaper, but during this verbal duel I acquired some notoriety for my arguments against unfair taxation. The superior logic of my articles eventually exasperated Dulaney and he publicly exposed me as a Catholic. The readers of the newspaper didn't seem to mind or care for that matter. I was expressing the prevailing sentiments of the citizens of Maryland.

Always under pressure to sell our land because of our religious beliefs, I convinced my father to keep our rightful ownership at all costs. As our discontent with the tyrannical practices of England increased, I was elected with six others to represent the citizens of Anne Arundel County and Annapolis at our provincial conventions in spite of being declared ineligible for a seat in the Assembly. The next year I was actually elected to represent our county at the State Convention, thus ending the elective office bans against Catholics.

I believe we will be unfairly taxed forever by England and will continue to be persecuted by the Church of England. So even though my wealth might be in jeopardy, I am firmly in favor of independence. A declaration to that effect is being drawn up by Thomas Jefferson as we speak, all thirteen colonies asked to sign. While there are many in Maryland who oppose independence, I believe I and my colleague Samuel Chase can prevail in turning around the fear factor.

I am stopping here in New York after a mission Benjamin Franklin, Samuel, my cousin John, a Catholic priest and I were given by the Continental Congress. We had the goal of visiting Canada in order to gain their alliance in the struggle for independence: to be in effect, a fourteenth colony. Regrettably the news is not good, but I have decided to share the details with my friend and colleague, John Jay before I make my official presentation in Philadelphia in a few weeks.

Also I am anxious to hear about some dramatic documents he is writing with John Adams and Alexander Hamilton. And he wishes to introduce me to an ally, Hayim Solomon, an active Jew in the Sons of Liberty.

What exciting times we are about!