



John Hancock was the first to sign the Declaration of Independence. The Library of Congress provides information on this famous American's background:

John Hancock, 1737-1793, was brought up by a wealthy merchant uncle who sent him to Harvard. Within ten years of graduating, he was considered by many to be the wealthiest merchant in New England. His sympathies however, were with the revolutionary movement and the British tried unsuccessfully to catch him in acts of disobedience. Mentored by Samuel Adams, he emerged as a leading revolutionary figure and in 1774 was chosen president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress.

His wealth allowed him to finance the arming of what was known as the Minutemen, a group of patriots ready to take up action, "in a minute." The inflammatory oratory of Adams and Hancock brought them to the close attention of the British and thanks to a warning from Paul Revere, they escaped just as the battles of Lexington and Concord started.

Elected to the Second Continental Congress, he was one of several leaders who had a bounty on their heads. After signing the declaration with his large signature, he declared, "There! John Bull can read my name without spectacles and may double their reward for my head. That is my defiance!"

He was thereafter chosen president of the Congress. He resigned the presidency in reaction to not being chosen Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. After three years in the Congress, he returned to Massachusetts and became governor, being reelected nine times. His support was thought crucial to the Massachusetts ratification of the Constitution in 1788.

A house he owned in Boston, and leased to his brother Ebenezer, still stands. One of the oldest homes in the city, it is currently owned (and used) by a law firm.

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Referenced information, and quoted passage, from the Library of Congress.

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