



Patrick Henry



Most people remember Patrick Henry for his famous line: "Give me liberty or give me death." They may not know that Patrick Henry tried his hand at many trades before he found his true gift of speaking. As a teenager, he attempted to run a store, but it failed. He married Sarah Shelton at age eighteen, and he tried to farm on land given to him by his father, but his crops didn't do well. Three years later, his house burned. Since Henry had started a family (he had six children with Sarah), he recognized the need to get serious financially, so he studied to be a lawyer. He passed the bar exam after six weeks of studying and became a lawyer. After Sarah died, Henry married Dortha Dandridge, and they had eleven children together. She outlived him since he died at age 63 and she at 73.

During his life, Henry became involved in politics and was elected governor of Williamsburg. He also participated in Virginia House of Burgesses as well as the First and Second Continental Congress. He is well-known for opposing the Stamp Act, which was imposed on the colonists by the British. The Stamp Act taxed all paper goods used by the colonists. Patrick Henry gave some impassioned speeches in his day, but none of them were recorded. Even the "Speech to the Virginia Convention" was not written down. This speech was so well done that William Wirt, Henry's biographer, interviewed others to put the speech back together the best he could approximately forty years after it was given. Even though Henry's words were well-spoken and evidently very memorable, he added some intensity at the end of the speech by picking up a letter opener and pretending to stab himself in the chest as he said his famous last line. This speech must have made some impression because the colonists did decide to fight!

