

Robert Morris

Robert Morris is often referred to as the "Forgotten Patriot". However, in Batavia there is a museum dedicated to Robert Morris, the Holland Land Office Museum. Robert Morris was born in Liverpool in 1733. In 1745 he immigrated to the United States. His education was consistent with the times and he was apprenticed to Mr. Charles Willing who taught young Robert the art of business. Robert Morris took these lessons to heart and soon was very wealthy. By the time he was 20 Robert's father retired and left him in charge of the family business.

From 1775 to 1777, Robert Morris was a member of the continental congress. He signed the Declaration of Independence. When the Revolutionary War started there was no government to fund an Army and this often lead to scarce times. Luckily, there were many patriots like Robert Morris who donated money to the colonies. For example in December of 1777 Morris donated \$50,000 to pay soldiers to continue to fight. In August 1778 Morris was appointed as a member of the standing committee of finance. Robert Morris donated large sums of his own money as well as borrowing money from foreign investors in his own name. Even though he donated thousands of dollars to the American cause Morris had a sizable fortune at the end of the war. The new Government of the United States paid back the loans taken out in Morris' name and business continued to be good.

During the conventions that outlined the Constitution for the United States of America Robert nominated and important General in the Revolutionary War, George Washington, to be the President of the fledgling country. Robert Morris was politically active himself. From 1789-1795 Robert was a Senator from Pennsylvania. George Washington had offered him a position on his cabinet, Treasurer of the United States, but Robert declined the position

Morris began investing in land around the new country. Land speculation allowed for a quick profit in a newly free and expanding country. Morris is the original owner of the land west of the Genesee River. He sold it to the Holland Land Company for approximately \$3.3 million. A pretty penny today, just imagine that amount 200 years ago. However, Morris also invested in lands that did not sell so well. These lands drained Morris' funds at an alarming rate and soon he was unable to pay his debts. The result is that he was sent to debtor's prison. Though he was eventually released from prison his health had deteriorated and on November 6, 1806 Robert Morris died in Morrisania, New Jersey.