

Biographical/Historical note

John Dickinson was born in Talbot County, Maryland on November 13, 1732 to Samuel Dickinson (1690-1760), whose father had emigrated from England in 1654, and his second wife, Mary Cadwalader Dickinson, who was the daughter of a Philadelphia Quaker merchant. John Dickinson had two brothers, Thomas, who died in infancy, and Philemon. The Dickinson family owned vast amounts of land throughout Maryland and Delaware, which is where the family relocated around 1740. John Dickinson was tutored at home in Kent County, Delaware by William Killen until the age of eighteen, at which time he moved to Philadelphia to read law for the former king's attorney, John Moland. From 1753 to 1756, Dickinson studied law at the Middle Temple in England, where he was admitted to the bar in 1757. Upon his return to the colonies that same year, he moved to Philadelphia to begin practicing law.

Dickinson was elected to the Delaware Assembly in 1759 and became speaker in 1760. In 1762, he was elected to the Pennsylvania General Assembly, where he served intermittently until 1776. As the relationship between the colonies and England became tense, the General Assembly chose Dickinson as their delegate at a meeting for the Stamp Act in New York in 1756. He joined John Morton and George Bryan in formulating a declaration of grievances. In 1767/1768, Dickinson published *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies*. These letters, which were printed in newspapers throughout the colonies, argued that the Townshend Acts were in direct conflict with the ideals of British liberties. When the letters were published in pamphlet form around the colonies, as well as England, France, Holland, and Ireland, Dickinson became the best known advocate of American rights. In 1786, he also wrote "The Liberty Song," America's first patriotic song.

In 1770, John Dickinson married Mary (Polly) Norris (1740-1803), who was the daughter of Isaac Norris II (1701-1766) and Sarah Logan Norris (1715-1744). Isaac Norris was a prominent Quaker and speaker of the General Assembly, and his wife Sarah was the eldest daughter of William Penn's secretary, James Logan (1674-1751). John and Mary Dickinson had two daughters who lived past infancy, Maria (1783-1860) and Sally (1771-1855). Maria Dickinson married Albanus Logan (1783-1854), the son of George Logan and Deborah Norris Logan.

John Dickinson was busy in the years leading up to the American Revolution. He was a member of the Stamp Act Congress in 1765 and the First and Second Continental Congresses from 1774 to 1776. He was occupied with publishing treatises on the American cause and penning resolutions and appeals to the King that he hoped would bring an end to the conflict. Because he believed that preparations for war must take place simultaneously with measures for peace, he raised the First Battalion of Associators in Philadelphia, of which he was colonel. Because separation from Britain appeared likely, he wrote the first draft of the Articles of Confederation. When independence was declared, he refused to vote on or sign the Declaration, because he still believed that reconciliation was possible. When the document received support from the majority of the delegates, Dickinson supported their decision by taking up arms and joining his battalion in New Jersey. Because of his dissent from the Declaration, he was not returned to the Pennsylvania Assembly. He resigned his commission in September and returned to the Assembly, where he led the resistance to the new Pennsylvania constitution. In November of 1776, he resigned his