

Maryland: Nathaniel Ramsay¹²⁰

Like a majority of his colleagues in the U.S. marshal Service, Nathaniel Ramsay represented Washington's ideal candidate for a U.S. marshal, with his experience and devotion to his country. Born on May 1, 1741 in Lancaster, PA, Ramsay moved to Cecil County, MD around the age of 30.¹²¹

In 1767, Ramsay earned his law degree at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) and opened a practice in Cecil County.¹²² When the American Revolution began in the spring of 1775, Ramsay served as a delegate to the Maryland Convention (Maryland's government during the war). However, he resigned his position and accepted a captain's commission in Colonel William Smallwood's Maryland battalion, a unit that would come to be regarded as the most professional regiment in the Continental Army.¹²³ As a captain in this elite battalion, Ramsay participated in Washington's 1776 New York Campaign and 1777 Philadelphia Campaign. Furthermore, Ramsay and his wife, Margaret Jane Peale (the sister of the painter Charles Wilson Peale, who was known for his paintings of Revolutionary War leaders) spent the winter of 1777-78 with the Continental Army at Valley Forge.¹²⁴



Portrait of Nathaniel Ramsay,
c. 1797-1808.
Courtesy of Independence
National Historical Park

The following summer, Ramsay caught General Washington's attention when he used his regiment to fill a gaping hole in Washington's line at the battle of Monmouth Courthouse. Ramsay's action allowed Washington to turn a near-defeat into a draw that boosted the moral of the American forces. However, Ramsay was seriously wounded and left for dead, leading to his capture. He was not released until November 11, 1780, thus causing him to miss the battle of Camden by two months.¹²⁵ Unable to find an opportunity to command within the newly reestablished Maryland regiment, Colonel Ramsay retired from the military on January 1, 1781 and resumed his law practice.¹²⁶

Following his service in the Revolutionary War, Ramsay served as a Maryland delegate to the Continental Congress for three years. After this, he returned to his law practice and held different political appointments within his local community. In these varying capacities, Ramsay

¹²⁰ Also sometimes spelled Nathaniel and Ramsay

¹²¹ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of Maryland: Nathaniel Ramsay," U.S. marshals Service, last estimated release October 23, 2019, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/firstmarshals/ramsay.htm>. (Accessed October 23, 2019).

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ "Nathaniel Ramsay (1741-1817)," Archives of Maryland (Biographical Series), last estimated release August 16, 2019, <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001000/001029/html/01029bio.html>. (Accessed October 23, 2019).

¹²⁵ "Nathaniel Ramsay (1741-1817)."

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

strengthened his bond with his community and also increased his personal wealth.¹²⁷ On September 26, 1789, President Washington appointed Ramsay to serve as Maryland's first U.S. marshal because he recognized Ramsay's influence with the people of Maryland and appreciated his stellar military record.¹²⁸



An 18th Century Map of Maryland.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

As marshal, Ramsay's influence enabled him and his deputies to conduct a successful enumeration of Maryland's population for the 1790 census. Unfortunately, the preserved sections of his schedules lack details such as the enumeration completion date and the names of his deputies.¹²⁹

Despite these deficiencies, it is clear that Ramsay successfully oversaw the completion of Maryland's 1790 enumeration process. Maryland had a population of 319,723 people, making it the sixth most populous state.¹³⁰ Today, Maryland is the ninth most populous with 6,042,718 people.¹³¹ Upon completing the 1790 census, Ramsay continued to serve as Maryland's U.S. marshal, until 1798.¹³² He maintained his position as a naval officer for the district of Baltimore, a position which he received in 1794, until he passed away on October 24, 1817.¹³³

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ "History - The First Generation of United States marshals/The First marshal of Maryland: Nathaniel Ramsay."

¹²⁹ "Maryland". *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 47. PDF. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.htm>. (Accessed October 23, 2019).

¹³⁰ "Maryland". *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 47.

¹³¹ "QuickFacts: Maryland," U.S. Census Bureau, last estimated release July 1, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045218>. (Accessed October 23, 2019).

¹³² Nathaniel Ramsay (1741-1817)," Archives of Maryland (Biographical Series).

¹³³ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of Maryland: Nathaniel Ramsay."