



## GEORGE WASHINGTON (1<sup>ST</sup> PRESIDENT)

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**APRIL 30, 1789 - MARCH 4, 1797**

**G**eorge Washington was born on February 22, 1732, to Augustine and Mary Ball Washington on their 1,000-acre farm in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Augustine had a daughter, Jane, and three sons, Butler (who died in infancy), Lawrence and Augustine Jr., from his first wife before she died. Augustine's second wife, Mary Ball Washington, gave birth to two daughters, Betty, and Mildred (who died in infancy), and four sons, George, who was the oldest, Samuel, John Augustine, and Charles. In addition to being a tobacco farmer, George's father was a justice of the peace.

George had an elementary education through tutoring. He memorized all 110 sayings of the *Rules of Civility and Decent*

*Behavior in Company and Conversation* and quoted them throughout his life. George's **father died** when George was eleven, and his half-brother Lawrence became George's **surrogate father**. George worked in the tobacco fields and later became a county land surveyor. Still later, he joined the Virginia militia.

As a result of cracking walnuts in his mouth, Washington had lost all his teeth except for one by age 19. He wore ill-fitting **dentures** made of slaves' teeth, causing him to use **laudanum** (a combination of alcohol and opium) to ease the pain. Naturally, he preferred soft foods, such as soup, cooked fish, mutton, and vegetables.

Lawrence and his wife died in 1752, leaving their **Mount Vernon** estate (built in 1734 by Augustine Sr.) and 4,500 acres to George. Also in 1752, George was commissioned a **lieutenant colonel** in the **Virginia militia**; he was denied a commission in the British army, as only men born in England could lead British troops. At 6'2", George was an imposing, majestic presence. It was said George was a graceful horseman and a sound decision-maker, with a **good mind** but a **quick temper**. At age 19, Washington came down with **smallpox**, giving him lifetime immunity to the disease, though it also probably made him **sterile**. It was believed half the population had contracted smallpox.

George's first exposure to battle was in 1754, when he represented Virginia and the King of England in the **French and Indian War**. George served as an aide to British **General Edward Braddock**, who was later killed in battle. The British suffered major losses because they marched in formation to fight, while the French and Indians fired their guns from behind rocks and trees.

At war's end, the British controlled everything east of the Mississippi River except for New Orleans. In 1755, George was commissioned a **full colonel** in the Virginia Regiment. George also became a member of the **Virginia legislature** in 1758 and resigned his commission.

In 1759, at age 27, George married the wealthy **Martha Dandridge Custis**, age 28. Martha's husband had died two years earlier. George and Martha would be married for 40 years. Apparently unable to conceive, George adopted Martha's two children, John and Martha, although both died at an early age. George also took responsibility for managing Martha's 17,000-acre estate. This, combined with his 5,000 acres made George one of **Virginia's wealthiest farmers**.

George called his wife "**Patsy**," and she called him "**the Old Man**," but when he headed the Continental Army, everyone called him "**General**." George bred hounds and held frequent **foxhunts**. He enjoyed Madeira wine, card games, and dancing the minuet. George and Martha lived in the Mount Vernon house. George, like other men of status, did not wear pants; **he wore breeches**, tight-fitting pantaloons cut off at the knees with the calves covered with knee-high stockings. Full-length pantaloons were worn by workers and soldiers. On formal occasions, George wore a powdered wig.

Before meeting Martha, George was very attracted to his 18-year-old neighbor, **Sally Fairfax**, who was married to George Fairfax. At one point, Washington wrote, "The world has no business to know the object of my love." But Sally and George supported the King and moved to England in 1752, ending Washington's hopes.

On October 25, 1760, King George II died, and his grandson became King George III.

On April 5, 1764, Parliament passed the **Sugar Act**, taxing molasses and sugar. On September 1, 1764, Parliament passed the **Currency Act**, prohibiting the colonies from issuing their own money. On March 22, 1765, Parliament passed the **Stamp Act**, imposing a tax on printed products. On March 24, 1765, Parliament passed the **Quartering Act**, requiring colonists to provide British soldiers with shelter and food. These acts led to protests that “**taxation without representation is tyranny.**”

On March 5, 1770, following a confrontation, British soldiers shot and killed five colonists in what was later called the **Boston Massacre**. On May 10, 1773, Parliament passed the **Tea Act**, requiring Americans to buy only British tea. In response to this action, in what was called the **Boston Tea Party**, on December 16, 1773, a group of colonists **dressed as Indians** threw cartons of tea into the Boston River. The British responded by closing Boston Harbor. In 1774, Washington was made Virginia’s representative to the **First Continental Congress**. Representatives from the thirteen colonies convened in Philadelphia. Their focus was the various acts imposed on them by England.

On March 23, 1775, addressing the Virginia legislature, **Patrick Henry** stated, “Give me liberty or give me death.” On April 18, 1775, **Paul Revere** and several others rode from Boston to Concord warning that the British were coming. The first battles of the Revolution were fought at **Concord** and **Lexington** on April 19, 1775, by **Massachusetts minutemen**, called that because they were ready to fight within a minute’s notice. The militia’s **minutemen** also fought the British on **Bunker Hill** with light casualties. John Adams stated, “Great Britain has at last driven

America to this last step, a complete separation from her, a **total absolute independence**, not only of her Parliament but of her Crown.”

After his June 15, 1775 appointment as **Supreme Commander** of the Continental Army’s 12,000 men, at no pay, Washington took personal charge of espionage. Referring to Washington’s appointment, John Adams stated that “the liberties of America depend on him.” Washington also created a small unit of bodyguards, called the **Life Guards**, to protect him.

On July 26, 1775, George Washington created a postal system for the country, naming **Benjamin Franklin** as its **first postmaster general**. Months later, Congress authorized the enlistment of riflemen (the birth of the **U.S. Army**), the construction of sailing vessels (the birth of the **U.S. Navy**), and the formation of a naval infantry (the birth of the **U.S. Marine Corps**).

Later in 1775, **Admiral Howe**, brother of General Howe, **landed 32,000 British troops** from 800 ships on Long Island. They headed for Brooklyn and Washington’s 10,000 troops, but under cover of darkness and fog, Washington’s troops escaped. In addition to having to fight the British, the Colonial Army had to fend off a **smallpox epidemic** that was raging through the colonies. Washington was immune to the disease because he had it in his youth.

On January 10, 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, a rationale for American independence. Over 200,000 copies were reportedly distributed. Following the issuance of *Common Sense*, the Continental Congress met and created a **Committee of Five** to **draft a declaration of independence** from England. The members were: **John Adams** (Massachusetts), **Ben Frank-**

**lin** (Pennsylvania), **Thomas Jefferson** (Virginia), **Philip Livingston** (New York), and **Roger Sherman** (Connecticut). Jefferson was assigned to write the draft, upon the recommendation of John Adams. Jefferson's draft closely followed George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights and was a reference for similar declarations by seven states. With **John Hancock presiding**, the Continental Congress met and discussed the draft.

On **July 4, 1776**, the **Continental Congress** unanimously approved Thomas Jefferson's draft of the **Declaration of Independence** (see Appendix A). It separated America from England. This action was followed by **France** officially recognizing America's fight for independence and declaring war on England, in large part due to Ben Franklin's influence while in France.

In New York City, Mayor **Whitehead Hicks** and New York Governor **William Tryon** plotted the assassination of Washington. They approached members of **Washington's elite Life Guard** through intermediaries. One, Thomas Hickey, agreed to do the deed. But he was found out and hanged.

On September 22, 1776, **Nathan Hale**, a Washington spy, was captured by the British and hanged. On December 25, 1776, George Washington led his army across the Delaware River and routed a Hessian contingent in the **Battle of Trenton**.

In early 1777, the **Marquis de Lafayette**, age 19, arrived from France and was commissioned a major general in the Continental Army. Washington attempted to abolish slavery in 1777 but failed when several southern states threatened to leave the alliance and go to war with the North. Congress authorized the **American flag** with its stars and stripes on June 14, 1777. Later in 1777, some 11,000 Continental troops were defeated by

13,000 British troops at the **Battle of Brandywine**, but shortly after, British General Burgoyne surrendered his 6,000 troops in the **Battle of Saratoga** to American **General Horatio Gates**. Both had arrived to train the Continental troops.

A precursor to the Battle of Saratoga was the attack and capture of the British-held **Fort Ticonderoga**, along with its 60 cannons and plenty of ammunition, on **May 10, 1775**, by the Green Mountain Boys, led by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold. Months later, Colonel **Henry Knox** was put in charge by General Washington to bring those cannons and ammunition some 300 miles in the snow and mud to the hills overlooking Boston. Knox did so in 56 days. At that point, the **British** knew they were defeated, as their cannons could not reach the hills, and they **left Boston** for Halifax, Nova Scotia. In New York, on July 9, 1776, patriots toppled a statue of King George and melted it down for 40,000 balls of shot for their guns as a symbolic end to King George's tyrannical rule.

With the **Declaration of Independence** completed, the Continental Congress moved on to draft the **Articles of Confederation**, describing the relationship between the states and a new central government. After a discussion of a draft by **James Madison**, the Articles of Confederation were approved by Congress on November 15, 1777.

Beginning in 1777, Martha Washington joined and listened to the concerns of husband George for a week every winter, where she knitted socks for the troops. **Martha was George's helpmate**, and he was very dependent on her for help and advice. During the winter of 1777-78, 14,000 of Washington's troops, consisting of farmers and other non-professional fighters, wintered in **Valley Forge**. The camp was some 20 miles outside of British-held Philadelphia. During that winter, some 2,000 died from the cold, disease, and starvation.

In late 1780, **General Benedict Arnold** betrayed **West Point** to the British and was named a traitor. He then joined the British Army and was named a general. At about the same time, the British left New York City.

On March 1, 1781, all thirteen states ratified the **Articles of Confederation**, establishing the country as the **United States of America**. The states were united into one country under a **federal constitution**, but the central government lacked the power to print money and levy taxes. In late 1781, the states began printing their own money. That same year, at the Battle of Eutaw Springs, Francis “**Swamp Fox**” Marion and his guerrilla style irregulars halted the British advance in the South. On October 19, 1781, General Cornwallis **surrendered Yorktown, as the French Navy blocked escape by sea**. The British defeat proved to be the final **decisive battle of the war**. Shortly after, **the British House of Commons** withdrew support for the war.

**John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay** went to Paris and met with representatives from England to finalize the end of the **Revolutionary War**. The Result was the **Paris Peace Treaty**, signed September 3, 1783, recognizing American independence.

On November 3, 1783, Washington ordered that the army be disbanded. On December 4, he had a final meal with his officers at **Fraunces Tavern** in New York City. On December 23, **Washington resigned his commission**.

Afterward, he stated, “Having now finished the great work assigned to me, I retire from the theater of action.” Washington returned to his home in Mount Vernon. There, his schedule was a 7:00am breakfast of fried cornmeal patties, followed by reading the papers. Then, it was time for horseback riding, checking his crops, and a late light lunch of soup at 3:00pm. This was followed by hunting with neighbors, then dinner at 7:00pm, featuring baked fish and cooked vegetables for his sensitive dentures along with plenty of Madeira wine.

In 1784, Thomas Jefferson proposed banning slavery in the new territories, but nothing came of it.

In 1786, five states asked Congress to call a constitutional convention. From August 1786 to early 1787, **Daniel Shays** and other farmers, deeply in debt and unable to make payments, led a **rebellion** that was slow to be stopped because of a lack of federal troops. On May 25, 1787, a **constitutional convention** met in Philadelphia to firm up the **Articles of Confederation** by drafting a new **U.S. Constitution**. It was essentially **written by James Madison**, noted for his writing skills. George Washington presided over the convention.

On July 13, 1787, the Confederation Congress enacted the **1787 Northwest Ordinance Act** which banned slavery in the Northwest Territory and described the process by which a territory became a state. This was one of 129 acts passed by the Confederation Congress before they became the Federal Congress, which first met on March 4, 1789, and passed several key acts. The first act of the new Congress was **An Act to Regulate the Time and Manner of Administering Certain Oaths**, which described the procedure for administering oaths and was signed into law on June 1, 1789. Another, passed on July 31, 1789, was the **1789 Federal Customs Act**, which established the Customs Service.

The **U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B) **was approved** by the Continental Congress by a vote of 52 to 3 on September 17, 1787. The three dissenters were **Elbridge Gerry** of Massachusetts and **George Mason** and **Edmund Randolph**, both of Virginia. Their objection was that the drafted constitution had **no guarantee of individual rights**. The draft now had to be ratified by at least nine of the thirteen states to become effective.

To convince the states that it was necessary to approve the newly drafted constitution, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote 85 articles in support of the drafted constitution,

describing the relationship between the states and the new central government. Hamilton wrote 51, Madison wrote 29, and Jay wrote 5. The articles were called the **Federalist Papers** and were distributed to the thirteen states.

On June 21, 1788, the **U.S. Constitution** was ratified by the required nine states. Delaware was the first state. New Hampshire was the ninth, preceded by Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. The last four states to ratify were New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.

Congress met in Federal Hall, New York City, on March 4, 1789, and declared the approved Constitution was now in effect.

**Article I, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B) states that Congress shall consist of a **Senate** and a **House of Representatives**.

**Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B) states **each representative shall serve two years** and the number of representatives in a state “shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.” Since slaves were bound to service for life, not a “Term of Years,” they fit in the “three-fifths” of all other persons. This was a big advantage for the southern states, which had the most of those “all other persons.” In 1790, it was estimated there were 700,000 slaves in America, almost all in the southern states. Article I, Section 2 also stated, “The House of Representatives shall have the sole Power of Impeachment.”

**Article I, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B) states that the Senate shall consist of **two senators from each state, each serving six years, each senator having one vote.**

Congress decided that representatives and senators would be paid \$6 for each day they were in session. Representatives and senators would be elected by the votes of those eligible.

Seeing the need for a process of requests for funds, Congress established the **House Ways and Means Committee**, which is provided for in **Article I, Section 7 of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B).

**Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B) states, “The executive Power shall be vested in a **President** of the United States of America.” He and a **vice president** shall hold office for **four years.**” **Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution** also states how the president and vice president are determined. Each state has a number of electors equal to the number of Senators and Representatives; the total constitutes the **electoral college**, and “no person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of the President, neither shall any person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty five years and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States.”

It took considerable **convincing by** Washington’s long-term friend **Alexander Hamilton** (who served with Washington in the Continental Army) for Washington to **run for president**. Washington simply wanted to stay retired on his Virginia farm. He had **deficient hearing** and an **unreliable memory**. Hamilton wrote to Washington that “on your acceptance of the office of President, having surrendered your commission, the success of the new government may materially depend.” Washington relented and finally agreed to seek the nomination. On June 15, 1788, **Washington** was nominated by the Constitutional Convention, along with several others, with **New York City** serving as the **nation’s capital**.

In the **election of 1789**, there were 69 electors in the electoral college. Each elector was to vote for two people for president. The person with the highest number of votes became the president. The person with the next highest number of votes became the vice president. The **1789 presidential** election took place on February 4, 1789, but the results were not known until April 10 due to travel limitations. **Washington** was voted president by all 69 electors and therefore **was unanimously named president**. **John Adams** came in second with 34 votes and **became vice president**. The remaining 35 votes went to other candidates. There was no popular vote. Adams believed that the voting confirmed that he was second only to Washington as a patriot.

**John Adams** was born on October 30, 1735, in Braintree, Massachusetts. He graduated from Harvard in 1755 and taught grammar school while studying law. He was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1758, and in 1764 he married **Abigail Smith**. They had five children: Abigail Amelia, John Quincy (who became the sixth president), Susanna, Charles, and Thomas. Before serving as Washington's vice president, Adams was active in Massachusetts state politics. He also was a delegate to the First Continental Congress in 1774 and the Second in 1775. Adams later served sequentially as an ambassador to Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands.

Prior to Washington's presidency, the **first eleven states** entered the Union, in order: **Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey** in 1787; and **Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, and New York** in 1788. Others that followed during his presidency included North Carolina (1789), Rhode Island (1790), Vermont (1791), Kentucky (1792), and Tennessee (1796).

In a letter to Abigail, his wife, who was still in Massachusetts, Adams stated, "My country has in its wisdom contrived for

me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived, or his imagination conceived.” Lacking any executive powers except standing in line to be president, Adams remarked, “**I am Vice President. In this I am nothing, but I may be everything.**” Adams was referring to succeeding President Washington. **Article II, Section I of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B) states, “In Case of the Removal of the President from Office or of his Death, Resignation, or Inability to discharge the Powers and Duties of said Office, the same shall devolve on the Vice President, and the Congress may by Law provide for the Case of Removal, Death, Resignation or Inability, both of the President and Vice President, declaring what Officer shall then act accordingly, until the Disability be removed or a President shall be elected.” Barring this happening, the vice president serves as president of the Senate with the sole responsibility of breaking tie votes. Without this responsibility, the vice president has no job.

On April 30, 1789, Washington took the **oath of office** on the balcony of Federal Hall in **New York City** (the site of the first Congress), as described in **Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B): “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of the President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.” **Washington added**, “That I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.”

Congress decided that **future elections** would be in **November** (not February) because the harvest would have been completed. And **inauguration** was set at March 4<sup>th</sup>, as it provided the time needed to count the November votes and wait for winter to thaw.

Although Washington was the **first president to serve under the enacted U.S. Constitution**, he was not the first president of the country. In **1781**, **John Hanson** signed the ratified Articles of the Federation as “**President of the United States in Congress Assembled.**” Even General Washington addressed him as President of the United States. After discussion on how to address the president, it was decided the first officer should be called “**the President of the United States.**” This was reflected in **Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution** (see Appendix B). Thomas Paine was the first to suggest the title. He did so in his 1776 book, *Common Sense*.

Washington was 57 years old at the time of his **inauguration**. Washington’s **First Inaugural Address** was ten minutes long, and mainly about presidential duties and the consequences that would occur if he were to break them. Washington had a **barrel of rum** for his reception. He later stated, “To be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace.” While serving in the military, Washington received no salary, only money for expenses. Washington asked Congress to do the same while he was president. They refused and decided to pay him **\$25,000** a year with no money for expenses. As vice president, John Adams was paid **\$5,000** a year. These were very significant amounts of money, as laborers were paid \$1 per week.

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