

The Very First Inauguration

On April 1st, 1789, the United States in Congress Assembled, popularly known as the Confederation, ceased to exist and the United States of America was born. Fourteen years earlier, the thirteen States that made up the Confederation had defied the odds, declared their independence and triumphed over the world's greatest power. But their first attempt at self-government had failed. Could the young republic ever become one nation instead of 13 states?

Then on April 30, 1789, one man steps forward on the balcony of Federal Hall to take the oath of Presidency. The population of the city of New York has doubled to celebrate his inauguration. Once before he had stepped forward during a time of war to serve the people. Once again the hope of the people was on this one man. He could have had any office in the country he wanted. They called him to the highest in the land. Benjamin Franklin won our freedom by his diplomacy. George Washington commanded it into existence on the battlefield. There could be no greater insurance for the Great Experiment in self-rule than to have Washington in command again.

At one o'clock, Washington stands before a hushed crowd of maybe 20,000. Vice president John Adams introduces him to the dignitaries and to the crowd below. He is dressed in a dark brown suit of American-made cloth, in white silk stockings, black shoes with silver buckles and a ceremonial sword. Chancellor of New York John R. Livingston faces him. Samuel Otis, a short man who looks even shorter next to the president-elect, is between them holding the Bible. Washington puts his right hand on the Bible and his left hand on his sword and solemnly repeats the 34-word oath of office after Chancellor Livingston, and then adds at the end, "so help me God." He bends down to kiss the Bible.

Chancellor Livingston says quietly, "It is done" and then turns and shouts to the crowd, "Long live George Washington, President of the United States!" Jubilant cheering breaks out. The American flag is raised over Federal Hall. A thirteen-cannon salute sounds out. The Spanish sloop Galveston at anchor in the harbor returns the salute. Washington bows to the crowd for a long time and finally reenters Federal Hall to make his first speech to the assembled Congress. It lasts 22 minutes. He next walks through lines of militiamen to nearby St. Paul's chapel to attend a divine service. The church bells toll and the celebration continues into the night, but Washington dines privately that evening.

The French Minister, Comte de Moustier, on observing all this wrote,

"The humblest was proud of the virtues of the man who was to govern them. Tears of joy were seen to flow in the hall of the senate, at church, and even in the streets... He had at once the soul, the look, and the figure of a hero. He never appeared embarrassed at the homage rendered him, and in his manners he had the advantage of joining dignity to great simplicity."

But let's go back three years . . .

Liberty or Anarchy

The economy had shrunk to half the size it was in 1776. The new nation had to start its own industries from scratch and find markets for its goods. No longer a colony of Great Britain, it lost its special trading relationship and its biggest trading market. Our products now cost too much in Britain. The other European markets, especially France, did not open up as expected. American goods even sold poorly here against cheaper and better made British imports. It was a tough time to start a nation.

An ever greater problem was the lack of national money like today's dollar. Only gold and silver were thought to be real money, and there was little of that. Outside of the large towns, most business was done by barter or exchange. Both the national and state governments printed paper money that they promised could be exchanged some time in the future for gold or silver. The States made the people use it, but no one believed that there would ever be enough gold and silver to exchange for it. Sellers charged a higher price for goods bought with paper money since there might not be enough gold to back it up. Soon it took so much paper money to buy things that it became worthless.

Regulators Ride Again

Many people borrowed to run their farms and businesses. The creditors would imprison those who could not pay their debts and sell off their property to be repaid. But trouble broke out in western Massachusetts in the summer of 1786 over some imprisoned farmers. Their fellow farmers showed up the day of the trial and so disrupted the proceedings that the judge and sheriffs had to release them. By forcing the courts to close, the farmers could save their property. There was no leader or spokesman. They called themselves "Regulators" taking the name used 20 years earlier by the colonists who refused to pay British taxes.

Then in January of 1787, it turned deadly serious. Daniel Shays led a thousand men to Springfield to take the weapons stored in the local arsenal. General Shepard inside the arsenal warned them once and then fired once. His one cannon shot killed four, and Shays's men fled to the west, to the Berkshire Mountains. But the state militia tracked them down, captured and killed some, and by May it was all over. Only the bad feelings and the debt remained from Shays's Rebellion (historians all spell it "Shays's". - editor)

The Founding Fathers Respond

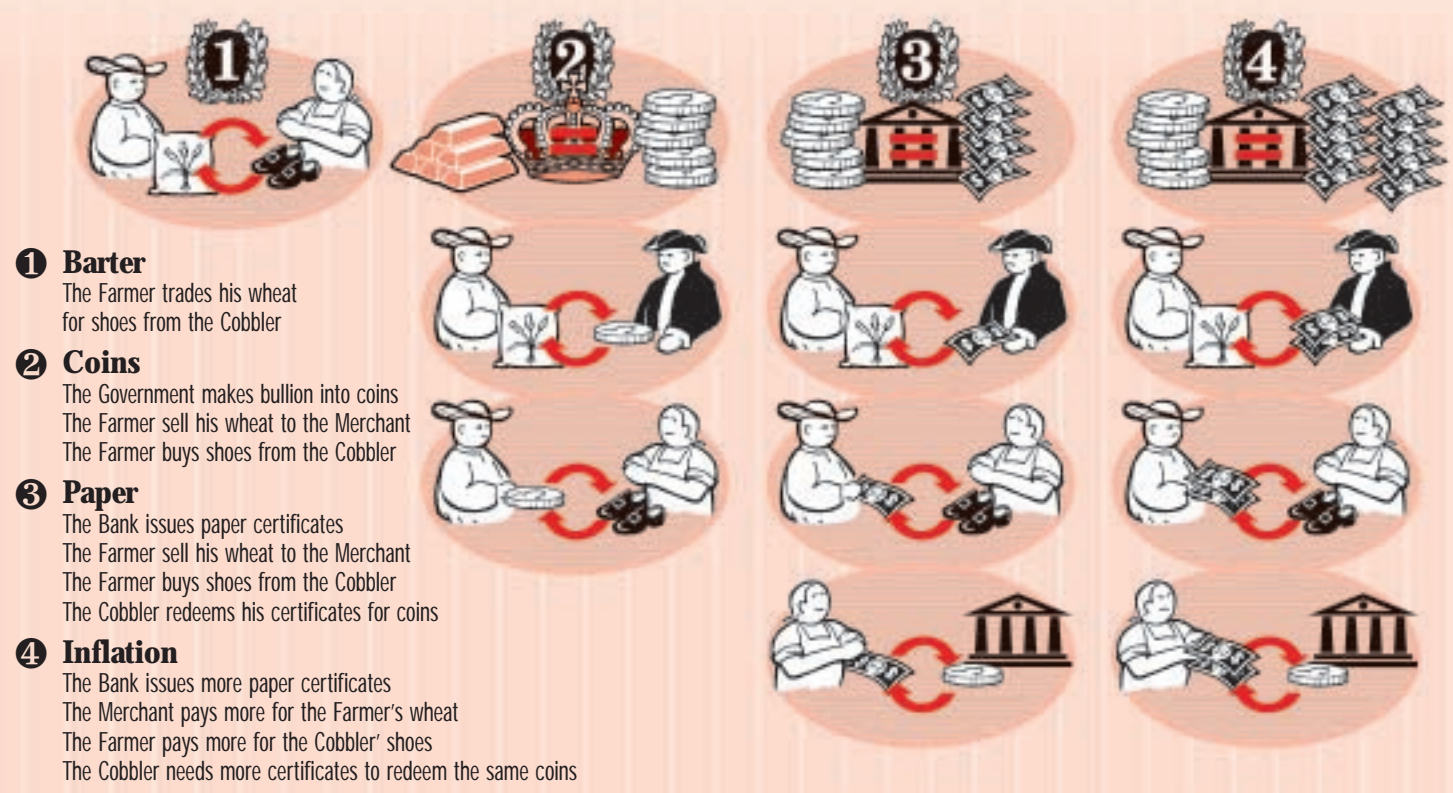
It shook up everyone. John Adams, the American ambassador in London was seething and frustrated. This happened in his state. He had even written its constitution! He felt the sting of a mocking Britain. He felt the urge to write, and so he did. He wrote a book of warning and what he thought the best form of government should be. He hated anarchy as much as tyranny.

Thomas Jefferson, the American ambassador in Paris, was only somewhat embarrassed. "I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere" he wrote that winter. He feared repression more than rebellion, but he also preferred order to anarchy.

Meanwhile George Washington was deeply worried over the events in Massachusetts. "If government could not check these disorders, what security has a man for life, liberty, or property?" he asked. "It is but the other day, that we were shedding our blood to obtain the . . . Constitutions of our choice and making; and now we are unsheathing the sword to overturn them."

When More Money Doesn't Mean More Wealth . . .

Barter - Gold Coins - Paper Certificates - Inflation



The State of Confusion

The States were really like thirteen independent countries. It was a freedom they clung to stubbornly. They made their own laws over their citizens (one was a state citizen first, then a national citizen). National taxes could only be raised from each State IF that State agreed to be taxed. They charged fees on any goods that crossed their state lines. They made agreements between States. They even began to make separate treaties with other countries. This was just what the European nations were waiting for - to divide them, and maybe make them into colonies once again. The States had liberty a plenty, but for how long?

This was the heart of the problem. The national government had no means to enforce its own laws. It was a confederation - not a nation.

Checks That Won't Bounce

In May of 1787, the country looked to the Philadelphia convention that would propose changes to the Articles of Confederation. Twelve states sent fifty-five men to decide the future of the Republic. It was ominous. Would it be just another meeting that resolved nothing? Would it dissolve the United States?? Would they go so far as to propose a king??? When the convention began, it first of all voted to keep their work a secret. And so *everyone* waited . . . for one month, then two months, then three months! After four months, the delegates announced their solution - Federalism!

This government was based on a philosophy called "checks and balances." The delegates feared the oppressive rule of a leader (a tyrant) as much as the oppressive rule of the people (a mob). Everyone feared that someone else would control the government and tell them what to do and believe. So each branch had its own job, as well as a say in what the other branches did. They could each say "no" to each other. That was their "check." All the different groups in government had to cooperate to get anything done.

It was a republican government and not a democracy. This meant that the people are ruled by law and not by men. The law itself was based on "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" to quote the Declaration of Independence.

It also was a representative government instead of a direct democracy. History taught that democracies were as dangerous to personal liberty as dictatorships. Democracy needed a restraining force - divided powers.

The Founding Fathers had been creating republican forms of government for over 25 years, first as colonies and then as states. They now made a much stronger form of national government, and added something totally new. They would divide the powers of government between the States and the national government. The States could no longer make their own money or any treaties with other nations. The new federal government now had the greatest authority to regulate trade and . . . it could collect its own taxes.

Blueprint, Not Smallprint

The new U.S. Constitution was really just an outline of government, and not a set of laws. It was like an architect's blueprint instead of a lawyer's small print. It split its powers between three branches, the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. The legislature, or Congress, was the law-making body. The judiciary would pass judgments based on the law of the land. The executive branch in the person of the president was to "execute" the laws Congress made and see them carried out.

The members of the legislature are elected directly by the voters of a congressional district. The president is elected by an electoral college who are elected either by the people or by the state legislatures. The judges are nominated by the president and confirmed by the legislature.

CEO

The president is the chief executive of the nation. His job is to enforce the laws of the land. He has the power to appoint many public officers and can grant pardons and reprieves. He receives ambassadors. He is also the commander-in-chief of the nation's armed forces. He can submit laws for Congress to pass. He can even call Congress into session or adjourn it in certain situations. But his real "check" on Congress is his veto over laws. He can "check" the judiciary by appointing Supreme Court justices. He in turn is held in check, too. Treaties can only be accepted with the Senate's approval. He cannot *declare* war and *no* standing army is allowed - just in case he wanted to make himself a king.

No one was completely happy with the new constitution, but none of the signers thought that they could do any better at that time. None of them thought of it as a finished job. They expected it would need some tinkering over time. This was important because it *could* be changed to fit new experiences. All of them were committed to Liberty and did their best to guarantee it for themselves and for those who would come after them.

Still, all this work could easily have failed. The Constitution succeeded in large part because of one man who alone in our country's history, by his very character, could shape how the government would work. His fellow Virginian, Richard H. Lee, described him as, "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen." He was George Washington, our first president, and the only president unanimously elected.

The Battle for Ratification Some Constitutional Players

For it Against it

James Madison
A. March 16, 1751 - d. June 28, 1836
political affiliation: Democratic-Republican
profession: politician
RESUME:
4th President: 1793-1801
Representative to House of Representatives: 1774-1775
Author & signer of Constitution: 1787
Representative to Continental Congress
Virginia state constitution: 1776

Alexander Hamilton
A. Jan. 11, 1755 - d. July 12, 1804
political affiliation: Federalist
profession: lawyer
RESUME:
Major General of U.S. Army: 1789
Secretary of Treasury: 1789-1795
Signer of Constitution: 1787
Representative to Continental Congress
Told to leave of Washington: 1777-1782

John Jay
A. Dec. 12, 1745 - d. May 17, 1829
political affiliation: Federalist
profession: lawyer
RESUME:
Governor of New York: 1784-1801
1st Chief Justice Supreme Court: 1789-1795
Negotiator of peace treaty with Great Britain
5th President of Continental Congress
Deputy to Continental Congress: 1774-1778

John Hancock
A. Jan. 17, 1727 - d. Oct. 8, 1793
political affiliation: independent
profession: shipping merchant
RESUME:
Governor of Massachusetts: 1780-83, 1791-93
Aid & 12th President Continental Congress
1st Signer of Declaration of Independence
Deputy to Continental Congress: 1774-80, 83-85
Member Massachusetts legislature: 1766-72

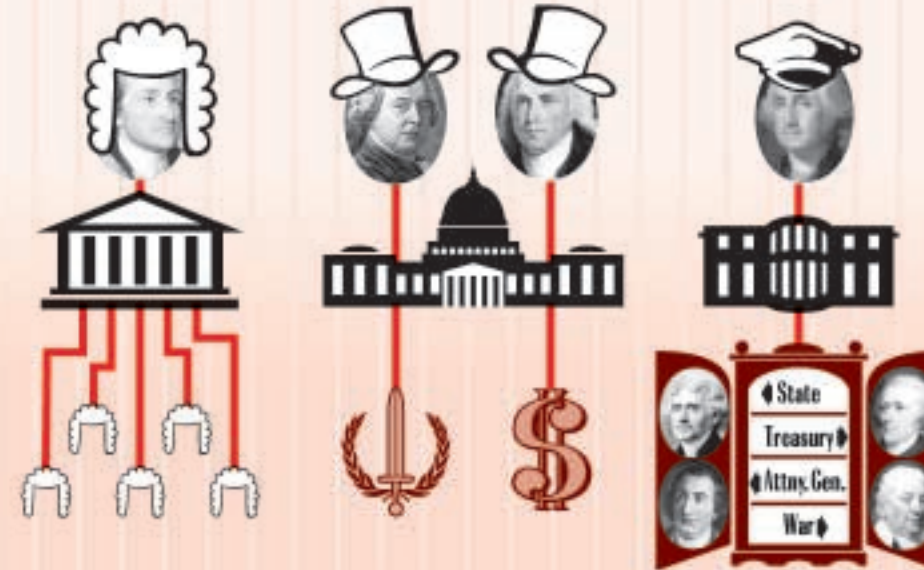
Patrick Henry
A. May 29, 1736 - d. June 6, 1799
political affiliation: independent
profession: lawyer
RESUME:
Virginia legislature: 1764-90, 89-94
Governor of Virginia: 1794-96, 1776-78
Deputy to Continental Congress: 1774-76
Seat in Virginia House of Burgesses: 1765-1774

James Monroe
A. April 28, 1758 - d. July 4, 1831
political affiliation: Republican
profession: lawyer
RESUME:
5th President: 1817-1825
Secretary of State: 1801-1807
Minister to Britain: 1803-1807
Virginia governor: 1799-1802, 1811
Officer, Revolutionary War: 1776-1780

Representative of the supporters of the new constitution are the three authors of The Federalist Papers which were originally published as a series of articles in newspapers. John Adams, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin are some others who also supported it.

Many well-known patriots, such as Samuel Adams, George Mason, and James Monroe in addition to these famous three, led the fight against the new form of government. Patrick Henry refused to attend the Philadelphia Convention saying "I smell a rat."

The Federal Organizational Chart circa 1789: the first officers



The Judiciary

John Jay
Chief Justice

He resides over five associate justices. The justices are responsible for the three circuit court districts, two justices for each district. They ride the circuit overseeing the circuit court judges.

The Legislature

John Adams
President of Senate

He is a non-voting member who presides over the Senate and casts tie-breaking votes when needed. The Senate votes to declare war and ratify treaties.

James Madison
Speaker of the House

He is a voting representative and the leader of the majority party. The House originates all spending bills

The Executive

George Washington
President

He is the head of the government and the head of state. He presides over his Cabinet of advisors and administrators.

Thomas Jefferson
Sec. of State

Alexander Hamilton
Sec. of Treasury

Henry Knox
Sec. of War

Edmund Randolph
Attorney General

How They Voted to Ratify the Constitution

FOR
 AGAINST
 DIVIDED



PRESIDENTIAL CHRONOGRAPH

1730 1740 1750 1760 1770 1780 1790 1800

George Washington: Boyhood, Surveyor, Officer in Virginia Militia, Life at Mt. Vernon & Member of Virginia House of Burgesses, Commander-in-Chief of Continental Army, Life at Mt. Vernon, The Presidency

Great Britain, France, Reign of George II, Reign of Louis XV, The French & Indian War, Reign of George III, The American Revolution, Reign of Louis XVI, The French Revolution, Reign of Teresa

Family & Friends

Mary Washington (mother, b. 1708 - d. 1789), Lawrence Washington (half brother, b. 1716 - d. 1792), Martha Washington (wife, b. 1731 - d. 1802), Henry Lee (cousin, b. 1766 - d. 1818), Marquis de Lafayette (personal friend, b. 1757 - d. 1834), John Adams (Vice President, b. 1735 - d. 1826), Henry Knox (Sec. of War, b. 1750 - d. 1806), Edmund Randolph (Attorney General, b. 1753 - d. 1813), "Mad" Anthony Wayne (general, b. 1745 - d. 1796)

...there is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness; between duty and advantage; between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity;" - G. Washington, 1789 Inaugural Address

Where Do "Washingtons" Come From?

He was truly the right man in the right place at all the right times. We cannot imagine a man like him today. There were many great men in his day, but only Benjamin Franklin could rival him. Why did he stand out?

By birth he was a farmer, and he remained one at heart all his life. He was born Feb. 22, 1732 on a prosperous Virginia plantation to Augustine and Mary Ball Washington. He was the first child born in his father's second marriage. Sadly, when George was eleven his father died, cutting short his influence on the boy.

His older half-brother Lawrence became like a father to George. It was through Lawrence that George, at the age of 16, became a surveyor for Lord Fairfax. In school George had done well in mathematics and drawing. These abilities fitted him to this job. When George was 19, Lord Fairfax arranged for him to be Culpepper County's surveyor. This gave him income to purchase land and set himself up in life.

Through Lawrence and the Fairfaxes, George was introduced to "high society." Here he polished his speech, which was slow and serious sounding. He enjoyed dancing and the parlor game of Lanterloo and fox hunting. He was an excellent horseman. By the time he was 20, George was 6'2" (at a time when the average height was 5'6"), was strong in body and had remarkably large hands and feet.

In 1752, Lawrence died and George became executor of his estate at Mt. Vernon, and inherited a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses and the rank of Adjutant General in the state militia. In 1761, on the deaths of Lawrence's wife and daughter, George also inherited Mt. Vernon.

During this time, George became a hero in The French and Indian War and commander of the Virginia militia. He twice miraculously escaped death. After his military duties, he married the widow Martha Dandridge Custis and began raising her two children as his own. He devoted himself to the life he loved at Mt. Vernon. He was not yet 28, but was already a large landowner, a military hero, and well known in society and the colonies.

The Model of Virtue

These accomplishments alone would not make him great. It was his integrity, his character and how he acted in these positions (what was called *virtue* in his day) that set him apart.

His *commitment* was tested over and over in doing what was right by his troops. As the commander for the Virginia militia and again for the Continental armies, he labored to instill the discipline and skills in his troops they would need in battle. Then he worked just as hard to get the food, clothing, equipment and pay they would need to fight another day. By doing so, he hung on to enough of an army through the crucial winter at Valley Forge until the French declared their support.

His *courage* was renown. He personally led his men in battles. He rode up and down the front line directing and rallying his troops. So visible was he that his troops marvelled that he was never even wounded. It took more courage than we give him credit for to take command of the Continental armies made up of farmers pitted against trained professionals. He had already fought in a war. He knew what he was fighting with and whom he was fighting against. If he lost, it meant his life. And the odds were against him!

His *calculating* mind knew how to adapt his resources to the situation. As a militia commander, he defended a 1000 mile border with about as many troops. During the Revolution, *he* chose the time and place of battle and used frontier tactics rather than an all-out battle to overcome the British soldiers' professionalism. He knew when to bide his time - eight months besieging Boston until his cannons arrived. He knew when to retreat - 9000 men and equipment, at night, in a fog, from under the British noses on Long Island. He knew when to bluff - log cannons and sentries kept the British in New York City. He knew when to seize an opportunity - a surprise attack on Christmas morning to capture a Hessian army. He knew how to suffer a defeat and still threaten his enemy, as happened at Germantown. He knew how to coordinate a major campaign as he did with the French at Yorktown. He didn't win all the battles, but he never lost the war.

He *commanded* men through their loyalty. In '82 when the army threatened to mutiny over back pay, Washington personally met with the leaders and, in the space of 45 minutes, shamed them by his own example and renewed their dedication to the cause of Liberty.

His sense of *duty* was often called upon. He accepted the call to sacrificial public service just as easily as he accepted his privileges. He loved Mt. Vernon and the life of a farmer, but he loved his nation more. He passed 22 of his last 45 years away from his beloved Mt. Vernon. He never accepted pay for his services during those years. He accepted the call to command the Continental army knowing full well the danger for himself if they lost. He never objected during the Constitutional Convention (he was also its presiding officer) when the executive office was drafted with him in everyone's mind as the executive. When his election was confirmed, he said he felt inadequate for the job, and then gave it his utmost. Even the year before he died, he was called to command the army to fight France. He did not refuse.

Just as important, he was also *dependable*. He was tested and proven. He combined judgment with responsibility. The Continental Congress gave him freedom to conduct the War as he saw fit without fear that he would use his authority and troops to set himself up as ruler. He could be trusted with any task given him.

But greatness requires one more thing - *humbleness*. And he was, before both men and God. He knew his strengths well enough to take on demanding jobs. He knew his weaknesses well enough, too, seeking out capable men as advisers in battle and in government. Humbleness before men meant putting the citizens interests before his.

He also knew his place before God, and was not afraid to admit it. In his public statements, he purposely paid homage to "the Almighty Being," "the Great Author," "the Invisible Hand," "the benign Parent of the Human Race." It was no playing-acting. In peace, he supported and served his local church as a warden. He also practiced a daily time of Bible reading and prayer. In times of trial, he was found praying alone and out loud in the woods by passerby's at Valley Forge. He encouraged his troops "to the higher duties of religion." As president, he publicly encouraged the citizens to be grateful to Him by proclaiming a yearly National Day of Thanksgiving. Humbleness before God meant service and gratefulness.

The people turned to him again and again. He never refused and he always came through.

The presidential Spin Master

What the Words Really Mean in 25 Words or Less

adjutant general

An assistant officer in the state militia. Washington held this office and the rank of major.

anarchy

A time of lawlessness in a society when no government can enforce order.

Anti-federalists

Those who opposed the ratification of the new constitution written at the Philadelphia Convention of 1787.

arsenal

A storehouse for weapons or other military equipment.

Articles of Confederation

The document that organized and defined the powers of the first national government of the United States. It was in force from 1781 until 1789.

barter

To trade one thing for another without using money.

blockade

To prevent all trade or communication into or out of an enemy city or port.

cabinet

The group of presidential advisors made up of all the heads of the executive departments.

Confederation

The shorthand name of the United States government under the Articles of Confederation.

certificates

A document or piece of paper that substitutes for something of actual money value such as gold or silver.

checks & balances

In government, a system of control in which the different branches of government limit each others powers so no one branch will be supreme.

Continental Congress

The law-making assembly of states that acted as the national government from 1774 to 1789. Its laws were subject to each state's approval.

democracy

A government in which power is held by the citizens and decisions are made by majority vote.

diplomacy

Negotiation between different nations or groups without the use of war.

factionalism

A spirit of disagreement that results in a group pursuing its own interests rather than the interests of all.

federalism

A form of government in which the members (the states) give up some of their sovereign powers to a central (national) authority.

Federalists

Those who supported the ratification of the new constitution. Also, those who favored a strong national government.

implied powers

Powers that are not stated in the Constitution, but are necessary to fulfill the responsibilities that are required of the three branches.

impressment

Taking sailors off of American ships by force to serve in the British navy.

inauguration

The swearing-in ceremony for the president and vice-president during which the oath of office is said.

inflation

A continual fast rise in prices because of too much credit or too much paper money and too few things of actual money value.

loose constructionist

Those who believe in the principle of implied powers to decide what laws are constitutional or not.

militia

An organized group of volunteers who train for war, but not as part of the army, and who are called out for emergencies.

rebellion

An organized violent resistance to the governing authority

Reign of Terror

The time during the French Revolution when government passed into the hands of the people. It was also marked by a large number of executions.

repression

To force a people or group into submission by restricting actions, words, meetings or protests.

republic

A government ruled by laws and not by a hereditary ruler, and in which the supreme power comes from the people.

strict constructionist

Those who believe that the federal government can only do what is specifically spelled out in the Constitution, and no more than that.

tariff

A tax on imports, and sometimes on exports, too.

Treaty of Paris

The negotiated agreement between the United States and Great Britain that ended the Revolutionary War in 1783.

tyranny

A government in which absolute power is held by one man. It usually becomes a harsh government of repression.

veto

The power of the executive branch of government to reject or cancel a law passed by the legislative branch.

Virginia House of Burgesses

The Virginia legislative body made up of citizens of the colony instead of nobles or others appointed by the king. It was founded in 1736.

A Brief List of Resources

Books

Ketchum, Richard M., *The World of George Washington*, 1974
A good history on his life, detailed and readable

Marshall, Peter & Manuel, David, *The Light and the Glory*, 1977
Thought-provoking research on the christian heritage of the U.S.

Welles, Sam (ed.), *The Life History of the United States*, New York, Time-Life Books, 1975, Vol. 1-12

A well illustrated series that covers main events, people and places

URLs

http://kuhttp.cc.ukans.edu/carrie/docs/docs_us.html
Text of famous documents of American History

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/presprvw/prsprvw.html>
Portraits of all the presidents and first ladies

<http://www.mountvernon.org/>
Website with some biographical notes and views of G. W.'s home

The presidential Briefing Paper

Little Known Facts About the Presidents

Presidential Superlatives (and diminutives)

- 1 Who was the shortest president?
- 2 Who was the tallest president?
- 3 Which president lived the longest?
- 4 Who was the oldest president while in office?
- 5 Who was the youngest president?
- 6 Who holds the record for presidential handshaking?
- 7 Who vetoed the most bills?
- 8 Who made the shortest inaugural speech?
- 9 Who made the longest inaugural speech?
- 10 Who won the most electoral votes?

George Washington - True or False

- 1 He chopped down a cherry tree as a boy.
- 2 He wore a powdered wig.
- 3 He and Martha had two children.
- 4 He freed his slaves.
- 5 He was the first to sign the Constitution
- 6 He introduced the mule to America.
- 7 He wrote the most letters of any president.
- 8 He fired the first shots of the French & Indian War.
- 9 His real birthday is February 11, 1732.
- 10 His false teeth were made of wood.

HINT - To check your answers, hold this page upside down in front of a mirror to read the box at the bottom of the page.

Technology Firsts During the Washington Presidency



1786

1st Steamboat in the U.S.
John Fitch
at Philadelphia on the Delaware River



1790

First Textile Mill in the U.S.
Samuel Slater
at Pawtucket, Rhode Island



January 9, 1793

First Free Flight of a Manned Balloon in the U.S.
From Philadelphia



1793

Cotton Gin
Eli Whitney
near Savannah, Georgia

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