

George Washington

The son of a landowner and planter, George Washington was born February 22, 1732, the British-ruled colony of Virginia. Washington was educated in basic subjects including reading, writing, and mathematics, but he didn't attend college.

During 20s, he fought a soldier in the French and Indian War, Great Britain's fight with France over the Ohio River Valley territory. After the war, Washington returned to Virginia to work as a farmer.

Virginians elected Washington to their colonial legislature, or government, when he was 26.

As a government official, Washington spoke against unfair laws, as high taxes, during Great Britain's rule. In 1774 and 1775, he was one of Virginia's representatives at the First and Second Continental Congresses, a group of representatives from the 13 colonies that would eventually become the United States. The Second Congress helped future third president, Thomas Jefferson, write the Declaration of Independence in July 1776, proclaiming the 13 colonies were now independent states, longer under British rule. An army was formed to oppose the British, and Washington was selected to lead it.

For five years, Washington served as the head of the army as the Revolutionary War the British raged. The British finally surrendered in 1781 at Yorktown, Virginia. Washington was now a hero, seen as an important person who helped the colonies finally gain independence from Great Britain. After the war, Washington retired the army and returned to private life.

After the end of the war, the former colonies operated under the Articles of Confederation: each state printed its own money. There was no national leader. The individual states were not supporting each other as one country, and the new nation seemed to be trouble.

In 1787 state representatives gathered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the Constitutional Convention to fix these problems. There, the delegates wrote the Constitution of the United States.

Based the Constitution's directions, states chose representatives to elect a president. Washington won the vote, making him the first-ever president of the United States. John Adams received the second most votes and became vice president.

As the nation's first president, Washington set the example for other presidents. He worked how the nation would negotiate treaties with other countries. He decided how the president would select and get advice from cabinet members. He also established the practice of giving a regular State the Union speech, a yearly update on how the country is doing. He appointed federal judges and established basic government services such as banks. As president, he also worked hard keep the new country out of wars with Native Americans and European nations.

..... Washington's time as president, New York City was the nation's temporary capital; then Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although Washington helped plan a permanent national capital, his presidency ended before the federal government moved to the city later named in his honour: Washington, D.C.

After serving two back-to-back terms as president, Washington retired to Mount Vernon in 1797. He died two years later on December 14, 1799. Washington, who kept one of the largest populations of enslaved people in the country, arranged in his will for them to be freed by the time of his wife's death.