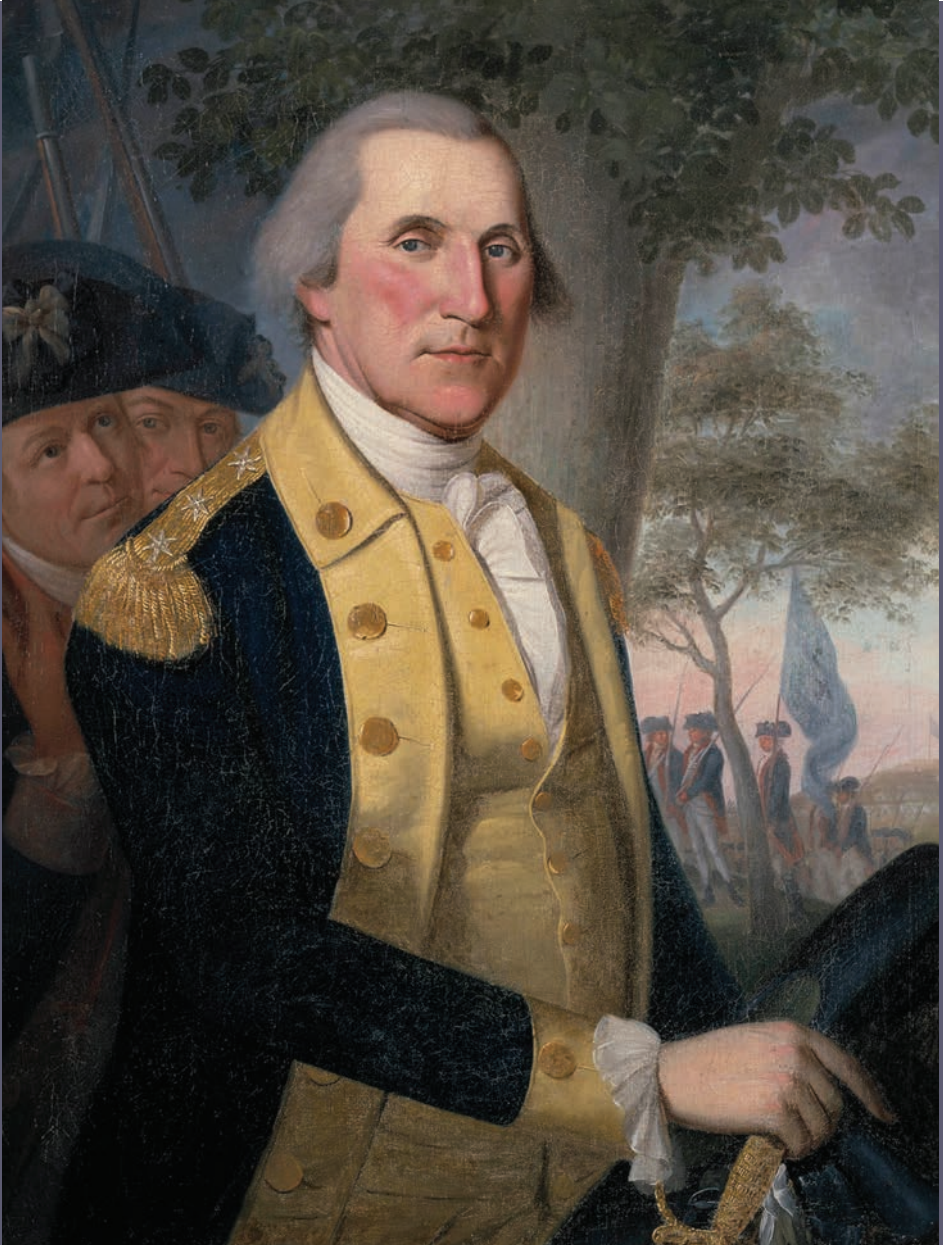


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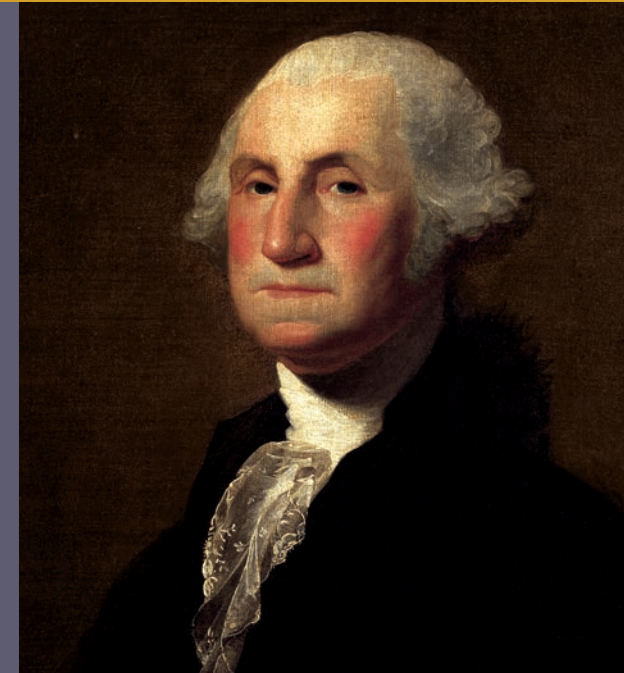
# GEORGE WASHINGTON



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DISCOVER AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

# GEORGE WASHINGTON



*President George Washington, portrait by Gilbert Stuart.*

**WRITTEN BY DR. DOUGLAS BRADBURN**

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By the end of his life, George Washington had received acclaim from people throughout the world. As the “father” of the United States, he would be revered for generations to come. His friend and neighbor, General “Light-Horse Harry” Lee, eulogized, “He was first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen.” But before he was any of these things, he was a boy from Virginia who longed for adventure and liked to swim and ride and read. How did he become the man who helped create the United States of America? This is the story of the remarkable life of George Washington.

## Early Life

Washington was born February 22, 1732 at Popes Creek Plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia. His father, Augustine, was a member of the Virginia gentry, an industrious man who grew his landholdings through investment and shrewd dealings. George’s mother, Mary Ball, was Augustine’s second wife.

In 1735, Augustine moved his family to Little Hunting Creek Plantation on the Potomac River. They moved again in 1738 to Ferry Farm, on the Rappahannock River, across from the port of Fredericksburg, where George would spend the next 10 years of his life. George was an energetic boy who learned to ride a horse, was unusually powerful, and loved to swim in the river. Aspects of his character would later be embellished into tall tales of remarkable feats, refusal to lie about killing cherry trees, and setting a moral standard unmatched in his youth. But the truth is more interesting. George Washington would fashion himself into the man he

wanted to become, and before he was 16, he had decided to try to make a mark on the world.

When George was 11, his father died. The Popes Creek estate went to George's half-brother, Augustine, Jr.; the Potomac River estate went to George's half-brother, Lawrence, who later renamed it Mount Vernon after a British admiral. Ferry Farm would be George's when he reached age 21. In the meantime, the small estate was home to Mary Washington, her five

surviving children, and dozens of enslaved men and women who worked the land and maintained the property. By all accounts, the land provided little more than the bare necessities.

Through tutors, family, and perhaps a short stint at a local school, Washington learned the basics. He excelled in mathematics and learned the rudiments of surveying. He did not attend college, and his formal education ended at about age 15, but he never stopped learning. He read books to further his education and by the end of his life, had one of the finest libraries in Virginia with over 1,300 titles.

Washington's older half-brother, Lawrence, served in the war between

Great Britain and Spain over their empires in the Americas. He pushed to have George join the British Navy, but their mother refused to allow it. Lawrence was more successful in getting George into the society of the powerful family of his wife, Anne Fairfax. At age 16, George accompanied a Fairfax mission as a surveyor on a short expedition to the unexplored wilderness of the Virginia frontier. By 17, he was county surveyor for the newly created frontier county of Culpeper. He was well on his way to a successful and profitable career. With his earnings from surveying, he purchased land, the key to all great wealth in early Virginia.



*Young George Washington as a surveyor.*

Washington also began to develop the social graces: he learned to dance, fence, the rituals of the fox hunt, how to speak and behave in company, how to dress, and to control his extreme emotions and act as a polite young gentleman.

## A Military Start

After Lawrence died, George was given Lawrence's "adjutant" military officer position of "instructing the officers and soldiers in the use and exercise of their arms" as well as "polishing and improving the meaner people," in the Virginia militia. It was prestigious and profitable, and it came with the rank of major.

In the 1750s, Virginia was growing rapidly, but the Ohio Valley, west of the Appalachian Mountains, was claimed by both the British and French empires. In 1753, the French, worried that settlers from Virginia and Pennsylvania and English traders were starting to move into the region, began building a series of forts south of Lake Erie, with the intention of building a fort at the forks of the Ohio River, the present site of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

*Washington (right) and his guide crossing the Allegheny River in 1753.*



When this news reached Virginia, Royal Governor Robert Dinwiddie appointed Major George Washington to deliver a message to the French demanding they leave the area, and learn about the French intentions, strength, and alliances with the Indians. With the help of a frontier guide and Indians loyal to the British, Washington reached Fort Le Boeuf with Dinwiddie's message in about six weeks. The return trip tested Washington's endurance. He hiked through snowy woods, fell off a raft into the ice-choked Allegheny River, nearly drowned, was shot at by an enemy Indian, and was forced to spend a freezing night on an island without shelter, but he suffered no ill effects. His account of the challenging 900-mile journey was published by Governor Dinwiddie in both Williamsburg and London, establishing an international reputation for Washington by the time he was 22. His discovery that the French had no intention of leaving and would attempt to build their fort at the forks of the Ohio after the spring thaw pushed Virginia and the British Empire to mobilize their forces. Washington was sent as lieutenant colonel of the Virginia regiment with some 150 men to assert Virginia's claims, and eventually, he would be made colonel in charge of nearly 500 men. They were instructed to "repel force by force."

Washington's men skirmished with French soldiers, killed 12 men including the French commander, and took 21 prisoners. Although the French claimed they had no hostile intentions, Washington believed they were waiting for an opportunity to ambush the Virginians. In this first experience of war, Washington retained his youthful enthusiasm, but his little victory was followed by an overwhelming defeat. Washington was outnumbered by a large force, retreated to a makeshift palisade he called Fort Necessity, and was forced to surrender after a daylong firefight with a mixed French and Indian force. The campaign ended in humiliation for Washington and ignited the French and Indian War, as both the British and the French escalated their efforts to control the future development of North America.

Washington resigned his commission after the surrender and returned to the frontier in 1755 as a volunteer aide to General Edward Braddock,

sent by the King of England to drive the French from the Ohio Country. Braddock's army of almost 3,000 men was destroyed near the Monongahela River and fled in confusion to Virginia. Braddock died of his wounds. During the battle, while attempting to rally the British soldiers, Washington had two horses shot out from under him and four bullet holes shot through his coat. Although he behaved bravely, he could do little except lead the broken survivors to safety.

In recognition of his conduct, Washington was given command of Virginia's entire military force. With a few hundred men, he was ordered to protect a frontier some 350 miles long, and it provided him with experience in commanding troops through an extremely challenging campaign.

In 1758, the British finally took the forks of the Ohio River, peace returned to Virginia, and Washington resigned his commission to return to Mount Vernon, which he had inherited from his half-brother, Lawrence. When he left his regiment, the officers wrote a tribute thanking him for his "steady adherence to impartial Justice, your quick Discernment and invariable Regard to Merit" and begged him to remain a little longer, noting "how sensibly we must be Affected with the loss of such a noble Commander, such a sincere Friend, and so affable a Companion." But his exit from the military remained bittersweet; he felt he never received the recognition of his talents that were his due, and he never received a commission from the Crown for himself or his regiment. It was difficult to be a colonial in an empire and was a frustration he would not forget.



*Washington as a colonel in the Virginia militia.*

## The Entrepreneur

Washington spent 1759 to 1775 as a planter and farmer at Mount Vernon. He sought the latest techniques in agriculture and gardening to improve and expand the mansion house and surrounding plantation. He established himself as an innovative farmer and switched from tobacco to wheat as his main cash crop in the 1760s. He recognized that tobacco destroyed the soil, required too much labor, and yielded little because the market was controlled in Great Britain. His frustrations at being a colonial expanded to include his sense of the injustice of the trade laws the British used to control their empire. To improve his farming operation and find a way to work outside of the British trade system, he experimented with new crops, fertilizers, crop rotation, tools, and livestock breeding. He expanded the plantation's work to flour milling and commercial fishing. His successes with flour would lead the way in the Chesapeake in establishing direct commercial connections with the Southern Mediterranean.

He redesigned and enlarged his house, and by the time of his death in 1799, Washington had expanded the plantation from 2,000 to 8,000 acres consisting of five farms with more than 3,000 acres under cultivation. He also built a large gristmill, began making whiskey, and soon built one of the largest distilleries in America. At its peak, Washington's distillery produced over 11,000 gallons of rye whiskey, becoming one of his most successful enterprises.



*Washington oversees farm work at Mount Vernon.*



*Washington's marriage to Martha Dandridge Custis, January 6, 1759.*

## Marriage

Washington's resignation from the military coincided with his marriage and transformation of his life. On January 6, 1759, Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis, a young widow. Martha brought enormous wealth and two small children to the marriage. Their life was a happy one. Although George and Martha would not have children together, Washington considered Martha's children as his own.

Martha would be a constant support to George and would join him in his winter quarters every year after the outbreak of the American Revolution. A patriot in her own right, Martha made it her war, too, nursing sick and wounded soldiers and raising money for the troops. In all, she would spend about half the war in camp.



*General and Mrs. Washington and two grandchildren with an enslaved servant.*

## Slavery and George Washington

At age 11, Washington had inherited 10 slaves from his father. In those days in Virginia, the institution of slavery was considered “a given,” and slaves, like land and other property, could be bought, sold, given away, rented out, and passed down through inheritance. As a young man, Washington was no different from other Virginia planter class members in his attitude that there was nothing morally wrong with slavery.

When he married Martha, Washington more than doubled the number of his slaves through “dower slaves” that she brought to the marriage. In 1759, there were about 40 slaves at Mount Vernon. Although Washington had control over the dower slaves, they were not his property; they belonged to the estate of Martha’s first husband.

The Revolutionary War would change Washington’s feelings toward slavery. Former slaves and free blacks served with honor in the American

army, and Washington’s enslaved manservant had served at Washington’s side. By the 1780s, Washington wrote openly about slavery that “...there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it.”

Later, there were 316 enslaved at Mount Vernon, and Washington provided in his will to free all of his own. But he could not free those (or their descendants) that Martha had brought. By Virginia law, her grandchildren would inherit her “dower slaves.” Washington tried to set an example for others to follow and was the only slaveholder among the founding fathers to free his slaves.

## The Revolutionary War

Washington’s alienation from the British Empire came gradually. His early frustrations as a provincial officer and reflections on the unjust character of the economic system would influence his reaction to news of British Parliamentary plans to directly tax their American subjects without colonial consent. Such an act was a violation of Washington’s sense of his own rights and his rights of property. By the late 1760s, Washington complained that it seemed as if “our lordly Masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom,” and in such a case, “something should be done to avert the stroke and maintain the liberty which we have derived from our Ancestors.” After the Boston Tea Party in 1773, Parliament punished Boston for the destruction of the tea by closing their port and passing the so-called “Intolerable Acts” which destroyed the charter of Massachusetts. Washington noted that “it is my full intention to devote my Life & Fortune in the cause we are engaged in, if need be.”

In June 1775, Congress commissioned Washington to take command of the army besieging the British in Boston. The command kept him away from Mount Vernon for more than eight years. It was a command for which his military background hardly prepared him. His knowledge was in frontier warfare involving relatively small numbers of soldiers.

He had no practical experience maneuvering large formations, handling cavalry or artillery, or maintaining supply lines to support thousands of men in the field. He learned on the job and had the courage, determination, and mental agility to keep the American cause one step ahead of complete disintegration until he figured out how to win the unprecedented revolutionary struggle he was leading. His main success might have been in keeping the army together through the disappointing early years of the war and keeping the country united in the disappointing later years of the war.

His task was not overwhelming at first. In March 1776, the British withdrew from Boston, but the withdrawal was only temporary. In June, a new British army under Sir William Howe's command arrived in the colonies with orders to take New York City. Howe commanded the largest expeditionary force Britain had ever sent overseas.

Defending New York was almost impossible. New York is surrounded by a maze of waterways that gave a substantial advantage to an attacker with naval superiority. Howe's army was larger, better equipped, and far better trained than Washington's. They defeated Washington's army at Long Island in August and routed the Americans a few weeks later at Kips Bay, resulting in the loss of the city. Forced to retreat northward, Washington was defeated again at White Plains. The American defense of New York City came to a humiliating conclusion November 16, 1776 with the surrender of Fort Mifflin and some 2,800 men. Washington ordered his army to

*Washington takes command of the Continental Army at Cambridge, Mass., July 3, 1775.*



*An 1867 illustration of young George telling his father about the cherry tree.*

## Washington and the Cherry Tree: Birth of an American Fable

*There is a bit of irony connected to the story of George Washington and the cherry tree. Intended to stress the importance of telling the truth, it is pure fiction. Author Mason Locke "Parson" Weems says he was passing along a tale told by "...an aged lady, who was a distant relative" of Washington. In reality, he invented the story to turn the life of George Washington into a primer for living a virtuous and moral life.*

*Somehow, 200 years later, that made-up cherry tree story survives. Children still learn that George readily confessed when his father*

*asked who chopped his tree. "I can't tell a lie," says the tiny Washington. "I did cut it with my hatchet."*

*Like all good fables, the moral of the story is lofty. "Glad am I, George that you killed my tree," says Washington's father. "You have paid me for it a thousand fold. Such an act of heroism in my son is more worth than a thousand trees, though blossomed with silver, and their fruits of purest gold." With words no father ever spoke, honest George, even as a child is embraced as a "hero."*





General Washington leading his troops across the Delaware River on December 25, 1776, engraving based on the painting by Emanuel Leutze.

retreat across New Jersey. His remaining forces, mud-soaked and exhausted, crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania on December 7.

The British had good reason to believe that the American rebellion would be over in a few months and that Congress would seek peace rather than face complete control of the colonies by the British. The enlistments of most of Washington's army were due to expire at the end of December. However, instead of crushing the remains of Washington's army, Howe went into winter quarters, with advanced garrisons at Trenton and Princeton, leaving Washington open to execute one of the most daring military operations in American history. On Christmas night, Washington's troops crossed the Delaware River and attacked the unsuspecting garrison at Trenton, forcing it to surrender. A few days later, Washington again crossed the Delaware, outmaneuvered the force sent to crush him and attacked the enemy at Princeton, inflicting a humiliating loss on the British.

For much of the remainder of the war, Washington's most important strategic task was to keep the British bottled up in New York. Although he never gave up hope of retaking the city, he was unwilling to risk his army without a fair prospect of success. An alliance with France and the arrival of a French army under the Comte de Rochambeau in July 1780 renewed Washington's hopes to recapture New York. However, together Washington

and Rochambeau commanded about 9,000 men—some 5,000 fewer than General Henry Clinton, who succeeded Howe. In the end, the allied generals concluded that an attack on New York could not succeed.

Instead, they decided to strike at the British army under Major General Charles Cornwallis, which was camped at Yorktown, Virginia. Washington's planning for the Battle of Yorktown was as bold as it had been for Trenton and Princeton but on a much larger scale. Depending on Clinton's inactivity, Washington marched south to lay siege on Cornwallis. On October 19, 1781, he accepted the surrender of Cornwallis' army. Although two more years passed before a peace treaty was completed, the victory at Yorktown effectively brought the Revolutionary War to an end.

To the world's amazement, Washington had prevailed over the larger, better supplied, and fully trained British army, mainly because he was more flexible than his opponents. He learned that it was more important to keep his army intact and win an occasional victory to rally public support than it was to hold American cities or defeat the British army in an open field. Over the last 200 years, revolutionary leaders in every part of the world have employed this insight, but never with a result as startling as Washington's victory over the British.

On December 23, 1783, Washington presented himself before Congress in Annapolis, Maryland, and resigned his commission. Washington had the wisdom to give up power when he could have been crowned a king. He left Annapolis and went home to Mount Vernon with the intention of never again serving in public life. This one act made him an international hero. King George noted to Benjamin West, historical painter to the court, that if Washington retired to a private situation after leading the Americans through the war, "he will be the greatest man in the world."



Washington at the siege of Yorktown, Va., in 1781, illustration by N.C. Wyeth.



*Washington presiding at the Constitutional Convention in 1787.*

## The Constitutional Convention

Although Washington longed for a peaceful life at Mount Vernon, the affairs of the nation continued to command his attention. He watched with mounting dismay as the weak union created by the Articles of Confederation gradually disintegrated, unable to collect revenue or pay its debts. He was appalled by the excesses of the state legislatures and frustrated by the diplomatic, financial, and military impotence of the Confederation Congress. By 1785, Washington had concluded that reform was essential. What was needed, he wrote to James Madison, was an energetic Constitution, for “without some alteration in our political creed, the superstructure we have been seven years raising at the expence of much blood and treasure, must fall. We are fast verging to anarchy & confusion.”

In 1787, Washington ended his self-imposed retirement and traveled to Philadelphia to attend a convention assembled to recommend changes to the Articles of Confederation. He was unanimously chosen to preside over the Constitutional Convention, a job that took four months. He spoke very little in the convention, but worked much behind the scenes to help

foster compromise and confidence, and few delegates were more determined to devise a government endowed with real energy and authority. “My wish,” he wrote, “is that the convention may adopt no temporizing expedients, but probe the defects of the Constitution to the bottom and provide radical cures.”

After the convention adjourned, Washington’s reputation and support were essential to overcome opposition to the ratification of the proposed Constitution. He worked for months to rally support for the new instrument of government. It was a difficult struggle. Even in Washington’s native Virginia, the Constitution was ratified by a majority of only one vote. Once the Constitution was approved, Washington hoped to retire again to private life. But when the first presidential election was held, he received a vote from every elector. He remains the only president in American history to be elected by the unanimous voice of the people.

## President of the United States

Washington served two terms as president. His first term (1789-1793) was occupied primarily with organizing the executive branch of the new government and establishing administrative procedures that would make it possible for the government to operate with the energy and efficiency he believed were essential to the republic’s future. His challenges were extraordinary. He wrote, “In our progress toward political happiness my station is new,” and “I walk on untrodden ground.” For “there is scarcely any action” that he could take that “may not be subject to a double interpretation,” or “be drawn into precedent.” The government was entirely new, and no one was certain if the laws would be obeyed. A wise judge of talent, Washington surrounded himself with the most able men in the new nation. He appointed his former aide-de-camp, Alexander Hamilton, as secretary of the treasury; Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state; and his former artillery chief, Henry Knox, as secretary of war. James Madison was one of his principal advisors.

He administered the government with fairness and integrity, assuring Americans that the president could exercise extensive executive authority

## George Washington at Valley Forge

*There was no Battle of Valley Forge. Yet the six months George Washington's army spent encamped there proved to be a major victory. The soldiers who arrived at Valley Forge on December 19, 1777, were tired, ill equipped, and disorganized. They lacked training and faced an uncertain future. Many were homesick. "I wish I could tell you I was coming home to see you," Jedediah Huntington wrote his family, "instead I am going to build me a House in the Woods."*

*By June 19, 1778, much had changed. General Washington had sustained his army through*

*Washington and his troops at Valley Forge.*



*snowfall and supply shortages, and used Prussian officer Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben to drill order into his troops. Captain Ezra Selden described the hours spent learning to soldier. "Our Army is at present very busy and intent upon a New mode of Exercise." Von Steuben's "knowledge in Discipline is very great, his method of maneuvering is very Difficult; but mostly satisfactory."*

*After months practicing von Steuben's drills, every soldier stood "straight and firm upon his legs...belly drawn in a little without constraint, the breast a*

*little projected, the shoulders square to the front and kept back." The trained army that marched from Valley Forge was ready now, for victory.*

without corruption. He executed the laws with restraint, establishing precedents for broad-ranging presidential authority. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known, no motive of interest or consanguinity, friendship, or hatred, being able to bias his decision." Washington set a standard for presidential integrity rarely met by his successors, although he established an ideal by which they all are judged.

During Washington's first term, the Federal Government adopted a series of measures proposed by Alexander Hamilton to resolve the escalating debt crisis and established the nation's finances on a sound basis,

concluded peace treaties with the southeastern Indian tribes, and designated a site on the Potomac River for the permanent capital of the United States. But as Washington's first term ended, a bloody Indian war continued on the northwestern frontier. The warring tribes were encouraged by the British, who retained military posts in the Northwest. Further, the Spanish denied Americans use of the Mississippi River. These problems limited the westward expansion to which Washington was committed.

Growing partisanship within the government also concerned Washington. Many men in the new government—including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and other leaders of the emerging Republican Party—were opposed to Alexander Hamilton's financial program. Washington despised political partisanship but could do little to slow the development of political parties.

During his first term, Washington toured the northern and southern states and found that the new government enjoyed the general support of the American people. Convinced that the government could get along



*Washington arrives in New York City prior to his inauguration as the first president of the United States.*

without him, he planned to step down at the end of his first term. But his cabinet members convinced him that he alone could command the respect of members of both developing political parties. Thomas Jefferson visited Washington at Mount Vernon to urge him to accept a second term. Although longing to return home permanently, Washington reluctantly agreed.



Portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart.

Washington's second term (1793-1797) was dominated by foreign affairs and marred by a deepening partisanship in his own administration. Washington assumed the presidency on the eve of the French Revolution, a time of great international crisis. The outbreak of a general European war in 1793 forced the crisis to the center of American politics. Washington believed the national interest of the United States dictated neutrality. War would be disastrous for commerce and shatter the nation's finances. The country's future depended on the increase in wealth and opportunity that would come from commerce and westward

expansion. One of Washington's most important accomplishments was keeping the United States out of the war, giving the new nation an opportunity to grow in strength while establishing the principle of neutrality that shaped American foreign policy for more than a century. Although Washington's department heads agreed that the United States should remain neutral, disagreements over foreign policy aggravated partisan tensions among them. The disagreements were part of the deepening division between Federalists and Republicans. Opposition to federal policies developed into resistance to the law in 1794 as distillers in Western Pennsylvania rioted and refused to pay taxes. Washington directed the army to restore order, a step applauded by Federalists and condemned by Republicans.

## Betsy Ross and the Flag

*In March 1870, William Canby, grandson of Betsy Ross, shared a bit of family lore. Based on stories he heard from relatives, Canby claimed that Betsy Ross, an upholsterer by trade, held “the honor of having made [the first American flag] with her own hands.” According to Canby, in the spring of 1776, Ross received a surprise visit from a congressional committee. The group included George Ross, the uncle of her deceased husband, and George Washington, then commander-in-chief of the army. The family version of the meeting described the changes that Ross made to a proposed design for a*

*national flag. Her most important suggestion—stars with five not six points.*

*When finished and hoisted up the mast of a ship in Philadelphia's harbor, the flag that Ross sewed “received the unanimous approval of the committee” plus “a little group of bystanders.” Canby's account, read before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, fared as well as the flag prototype. With ease, the story slipped comfortably into U.S. history. As the nation approached 100 years of independence, the story of clever Betsy Ross nicely matched a national hunger for heroes and role models.*

Washington (seated), Robert Morris, and George Ross discuss the flag's design with Betsy Ross.





*Mount Vernon painted by Edward Savage, ca. 1787-1792.*

Despite Washington's disappointment with the rise of partisanship, the last years of his presidency were distinguished by important achievements. The long Indian war on the northwestern frontier was won, Britain surrendered its forts in the Northwest, and Spain opened the Mississippi River to American commerce. These achievements opened the West to settlement. Washington's Farewell Address helped to summarize many of his strongest-held beliefs about what it would take to sustain and grow the young nation that he helped found. The Farewell Address became an important political statement in the nineteenth century as Washington encouraged Americans to embrace their nationhood, reject petty regional differences, be wary of foreign alliances, and patronize education.

## The Final Years

Finally retired from public service, Washington returned with his wife, Martha, to their beloved Mount Vernon. Unfortunately for Washington, his time at the estate would be short lived.

On December 12, 1799, Washington was on horseback supervising farming activities from late morning until 3 pm. The weather shifted from

light snow to hail and then to rain. Upon his return, it was suggested that he change out of his wet riding clothes before dinner. Known for his punctuality, Washington chose to remain in his damp clothing.

Washington developed a sore throat and became increasingly hoarse. He went to bed and awoke in terrible discomfort at around 2 am. Martha was concerned and wanted to send for help. At Washington's request, his secretary, Tobias Lear, sent for George Rawlins, an overseer at Mount Vernon, who bled Washington. Lear also sent to Alexandria for Dr. James Craik, the family doctor, who was Washington's trusted friend and physician for 40 years. As Washington's condition worsened, two additional doctors were sent for.

Despite the doctors' heroic treatment, Washington continued to decline. He called for his two wills and directed that the unused one be burned. Between 10 pm and 11 pm on December 14, 1799, Washington died. He was surrounded by people who were close to him, including his wife, who sat at the foot of the bed; his friends, Dr. Craik and Tobias Lear; housemaids, Caroline, Molly, and Charlotte; and his valet, Christopher Sheels, who stood in the room throughout the day. According to his wishes, Washington was not buried for three days. During that time, his body lay in a mahogany casket in the New Room. On December 18, 1799, a solemn funeral was held at Mount Vernon.

For over two months, the nation mourned the loss of the man who had become known as the "father of the country," and tributes appeared throughout American and European newspapers, celebrating the life of "the greatest man of the age." Over 200 years since his death, George Washington's life remains a lesson in courage, humility, and human accomplishment.



*The death of Washington at Mount Vernon, December 14, 1799.*

*The following National Park Service sites interpret different aspects of George Washington's life. For more information on our national parks, please visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).*

**George Washington Birthplace National Monument** in Virginia includes the foundation of the house where Washington was born.

**Fort Necessity National Battlefield** in Farmington, Pa., is where Washington and his troops were defeated in 1754 during the French and Indian War.

**Longfellow House - Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site** in Cambridge, Mass., was the site where George Washington took command of the Continental Army in 1775.

**Valley Forge National Historical Park** in Pennsylvania preserves Washington's headquarters and the Continental Army's 1777-1778 winter encampment site.

**Morristown National Historical Park** in New Jersey is where the Continental Army under Washington's leadership emerged as a disciplined fighting force.

**Colonial National Historical Park-Yorktown Battlefield** in Virginia is where General Washington, with allied American and French forces, defeated the British army on October 19, 1781.

**Federal Hall National Memorial** in New York is where Washington took the oath as first president of the United States in 1789. The building serves as a memorial to Washington.

**Independence National Historical Park** in Philadelphia includes the site of the original house where Washington lived and that served as the "White House" from 1790 to 1800.

**The White House** in Washington, D.C., has been the residence of U.S. presidents since November 1800. The cornerstone was laid in 1792 on the site selected by George Washington.

**Arlington House** in Virginia was built by George Washington Parke Custis, grandson of Martha Washington through her first marriage.

**The Washington Monument**, a 555-foot obelisk, is a dominating feature of the Nation's Capital and honors the country's first president. The monument was dedicated on February 21, 1885.

**Mount Rushmore National Memorial** features images of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt, sculpted on the face of a granite mountain in South Dakota's Black Hills.

**George Washington Memorial Parkway** along the Potomac River connects Mount Vernon to the Great Falls of the Potomac, where Washington demonstrated his skill as an engineer.

The National Park System is comprised of over 400 sites located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa.

America's national parks preserve and protect our nation's history and beauty. There are parks that commemorate famous Americans, important battles, and the civil rights movement. Other sites interpret great inventions and innovations. You can view the spectacular beauty of our natural wonders and enjoy recreation and relaxation in these special places.

With so many national parks telling so many stories, there are dozens for you to discover. Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov). You'll have an amazing adventure as you explore and experience America's national parks.



*Dr. Douglas Bradburn is the founding director of the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington. Thanks to Stephen McLeod and Dawn Bonner at George Washington's Mount Vernon. For more information about George Washington's Mount Vernon, contact [www.MountVernon.org](http://www.MountVernon.org). Sidebar text by Ron Thomson.*

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## DISCOVER AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS

# GEORGE WASHINGTON



Considered the father of the United States, George Washington received acclaim from people throughout the world. His life was a testament to courage, humility, and human accomplishment. By the time Washington was 16, he had already decided to make a mark on the world. Beginning as a surveyor, becoming a military hero and commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, and presiding over the Constitutional Convention were steppingstones on a road that led him to become the first president of the United States. This booklet, filled with historical images, takes you inside the remarkable life of George Washington.