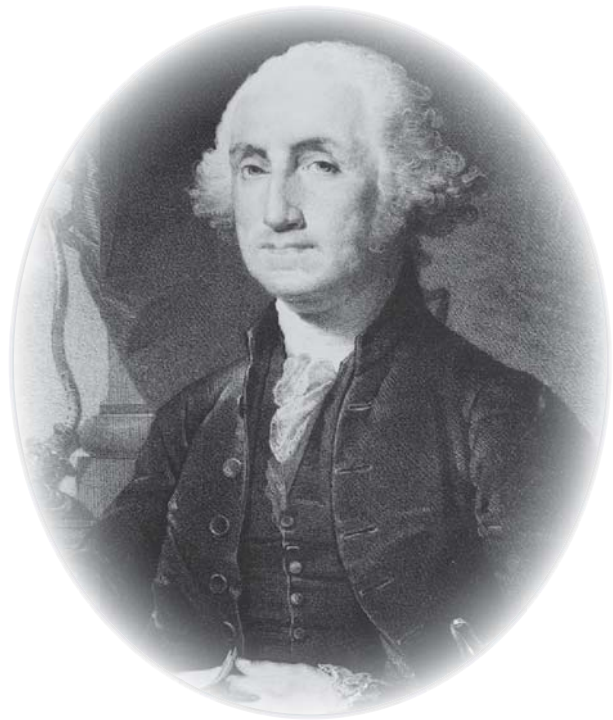


PRESIDENT #1

Thank you, George Washington

(1789-1797)



Upon returning to the theater, since we were a bit early, we meandered over to the bar for our cool drink, and while there, had the pleasure of meeting again the nice couple we had met the previous week. They seemed equally pleased to see us as well. So as we sipped, we inquired of them their appraisal of what we had seen the past week. Their reply indicated, just as we had determined, that the film was great, and they had learned a lot. We wondered, however, whether the live show we would see that night would be as interesting, but we all agreed that we were anxious to see it. The lights flickered, and we were off to get seated.

At the opening curtain, this time, the audience was not disappointed, as we heard an appreciative murmur attesting to that. The setting of the stage was interesting. At the far end, which was on our left, we saw a group of men, attired in colonial clothing in what appeared to be a meeting hall debate. On the wall behind them was a map of the thirteen colonies. The calendar on the wall denoted that it was March 4, 1789, and these men had just adopted the Constitution, which created a republic to be named the United States of America. Looking farther down, we saw a large formal-appearing poster, which identified that this newly created nation consisted of a population of about three-and-a-half million people, of which more than 20 percent were slaves. It further indicated that although Philadelphia was the largest populated city with thirty-four thousand inhabitants, and New York, Boston, and Charleston followed, the capital of the nation would be

in the city of New York.

We saw the acreage of the Northwest Territory, bounded by the Great Lakes in the north, the Ohio River on the south and the Mississippi River on the west. This territory had been organized with a procedure whereby each of its sections could apply for statehood when they reached certain population requirements. This frontier backwoods zone continued to be invaded by whites with their ongoing attempts at settlement, which usually resulted in violent fighting by the resistant Indian tribes, particularly those in the Ohio/Indiana area.

When the Declaration of Independence was approved in 1776, George Washington was not a signer, since he was with his troops in New York. In 1787, he was elected to be president of the Constitutional Congress. The Constitution was written in 1787, adopted in 1788 and finally took effect in 1789. George Washington was the first signer of the Constitution.

Slavery began when Spain introduced it into her colonies in the 1520s. A century later, in 1619, a Dutch ship sold the first slaves in North America, at Jamestown, Virginia. Slavery then flourished, chiefly in the South. In 1700, there were 21,000 slaves. In 1750, 242,000, followed by 698,000 in 1790, and by 1810, there were 1,191,000.

There are thirty-nine names on the Constitution, but only thirty-eight signers? John Dickinson of Delaware gave permission to his colleague George Read to sign his name if he wasn't present. It should be realized that all the signers were true patriots since they immediately became known as "traitors" by the British.

The meeting of the new government was to be on March 4, 1789, but because some states did not send their delegates on time, it was April 6 before a quorum of both houses could be formed. When the votes were counted, Washington, who received the most, was named president, and John Adams, the runner-up, named vice president.

George Washington was a wealthy, respectable, Southern landowner and farmer, and he had served his country as a hero in the wars. He was seen frequently driving in his British-made carriage adorned with gilt cherubim, and dressed in his fashionable British-made clothing.

He had fought with the colonists in the French and Indian wars, been active in Virginia politics, as well as the Continental Congress, appointed as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, and president of the Constitutional Congress. He was in the right place at the right time, and intuitively fully dressed impressively in his military garb when he was unanimously elected as president of the United States.

When the news that he had been chosen for the presidency was communicated to Mt. Vernon, on April 14, 1789, he departed for the seat of government in New York on the 16th.

His trip to New York was one continual triumph. The roads were lined up with people who came out to see him as he passed overland. As his journey progressed, and while on a barge crossing the Delaware River into New Jersey near Trenton, the opposite shore of the river was thronged with an enthusiastic crowd. An arch, composed of laurels and hothouse flowers, spanned the bridge and on the crown of the arch, in letters of leaves and blossoms, were the words, "December 26, 1776," while on the space beneath was the sentence, "The Defender of the Mothers will be the Protector of the Daughters." Here, many of the women of the city congregated, and as Washington passed un-

der the arch, a group of young girls dressed in white and crowned with garlands strewed flowers before him and sang a song of welcome. Then continuing on land again, he reached the Hudson River on April 23, and when crossing at night into New York, there was brilliant fireworks illuminating the sky, and with bands playing, the patriotic welcome continued.

On the morning of April 30, 1789, religious services were held in all the churches, and at noon the city troops paraded before Washington's door, and soon afterwards the Committees of Congress and heads of

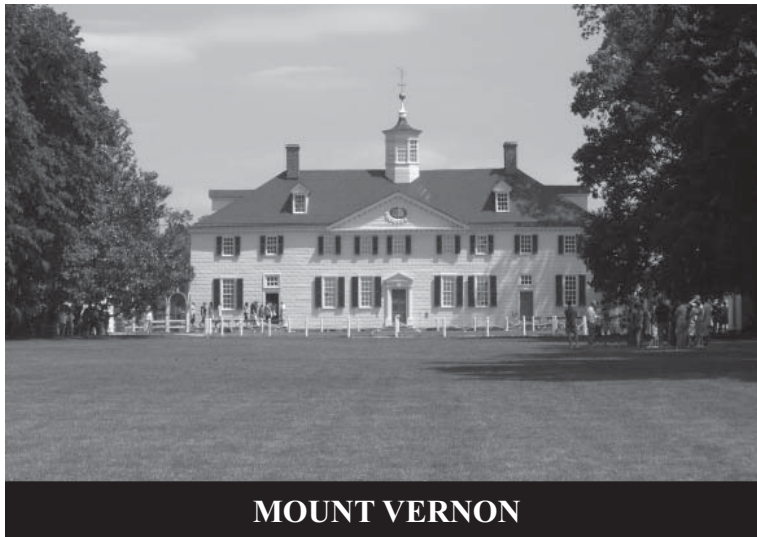
departments arrived in their carriages. A procession was formed and preceded by troops moving forward to the Old City Hall (Federal Hall).

Washington rode in a state coach, and the chief officials in their own carriages. The foreign ministers and a long train of citizens followed, and the windows along the entire line

of the route were crowded with spectators.

Washington then, when leaving the carriage, walked through two lines of troops into the Senate Chamber, where the vice president, the Senate, and the members of the House of Representatives were assembled. John Adams conducted Washington to a chair of state at the upper end of the room. There was a silent pause, and Vice President Adams then informed the president that all things were prepared for him to take the oath of office. The oath would be administered by the chancellor of the state of New York, on a balcony, and in full view of the people assembled below.

Here now, front and center on our stage, is George Washington. He is on the balcony of the old City Hall, now named Federal Hall, in New York City, the capitol of the United States. He is accompanied by several officials, and is attired in a full brown cloth suit (noted to be of American manufacture), with a steel-hilted dress sword, white silk stockings and silver shoe buckles. His hair is dressed and powdered in the fashion of the day. Loud shouts greet his appearance. He is obviously



shaken by this show of public affection, and advancing to the front of the balcony, places his hand upon his heart, bows several times, and then sits down on an armchair next to the table.

He is supported on his right by John Adams, and on the left, by the Chancellor of New York. The Bible is held on a crimson cushion by the secretary of the Senate, while the chancellor reads the oath to him, slowly and distinctly. He repeats. *“I do solemnly swear 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 keeps his hand on the open Bible, and on the conclusion of the oath, he solemnly responds and adds, *“I swear, so help me God.”* The secretary offers to raise the Bible to his lips, but he bows down reverently and kisses it. The chancellor now steps forward and exclaims, *“Long live George Washington, President of the United States.”* A flag with thirteen stars is run up on the cupola of the hall; thirteen guns on the battery are discharged, while the bells of the city burst into joyous peals and the voices of the people burst forth with the grandest of all forms of homage.

He is tall, broad shouldered and dignified in appearance, measuring six feet two inches, and weighs about 190 pounds, as he towers over all his associates. His prominent lower jaw juts out, as he poses erect, supposedly due to an oversized set of false teeth, which had been constructed for him by a silversmith. He obviously presents as a very stately, impressive figure of a man.

It had taken six years of political discussion, following the end of the war, to elect the first president, so it is no wonder that there were those who wished to refer to him as “Your Excellency.”

He delivered his inaugural address, which at first is an admission that the presidency was not sought by him, and despite having qualms about his ability to meet the awesome responsibility that those who elected him anticipated, he would accept the position obediently, having such an ardent love of country inspired by the principles on which it was founded.

Some excerpts of his address follows:

“...it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over

The oath or affirmation of office of the president of the United States was established in the United States Constitution and is mandatory for a president upon beginning a term of office. The words are still the same as repeated originally. It is generally administered by the chief justice or sometimes another federal judge. By convention, incoming presidents raised their right hand and hold the other on a Bible while delivering the oath. It is uncertain how many presidents used a Bible or added the words, *“So help me God,”* although it was not required; nonetheless, all modern presidents have added the phrase. Franklin Pierce was the first president to use the word affirm rather than swear.

Teddy Roosevelt did not use a Bible when taking the oath in 1901. Dwight Eisenhower, Harry Truman, and Richard Nixon swore the oath on two Bibles. John Quincy Adams swore on a book of law. Modern presidents, except Harry Truman during his first inauguration, do not kiss the Bible. They also have generally stated their own name, following the *“I, George Washington, do...”*

the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes, and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success the functions allotted to its charge.”

“By the article establishing the executive department it is made the duty of the President to recommend to your consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.”

“...it will remain with your judgment to decide how far an exercise of the occasional power delegated by the fifth article of the Constitution is rendered expedient at the present juncture by the nature of inquietude which has given birth to them.”