**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

George Washington (1732-1799), won a lasting place in American history as the "Father of the Country." For nearly 20 years, he guided his country much as a father guides a growing child.

In three important ways, Washington helped shape the beginning of the United States. First, he commanded the Continental Army that won American independence from Britain in the American Revolution (1775-1783). Second, Washington served as president of the convention that wrote the Constitution of the United States. Third, he was elected the first president of the United States.

Most Americans of his day loved Washington. His army officers would have tried to make him king if he had let them. From the American Revolution on, his birthday was celebrated each year throughout the country.

Washington lived an exciting life. As a boy, he explored the wilderness. When he grew older, he helped the British fight the French and Indians. Several times, he was nearly killed. As a general, he suffered hardships with his troops. Perhaps the worst were the cold winters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, and Morristown, New Jersey. He lost many battles. But he led the American army to final victory at Yorktown, Virginia. After he became president, he solved many problems in turning the plans of the Constitution into a working government.

Washington went to school only until he was about 14 or 15. But he learned to make the most of all his abilities and opportunities. Washington's patience and understanding of others helped him win people to his side.

There are great differences between the United States of Washington's day and that of today. The new nation was small and weak. It stretched west only to the Mississippi River. It had fewer than 4,000,000 people. Most people made their living by farming. Few children went to school. Many men and women could not read or write. Transportation and communication were slow. It took Washington three days to travel about 90 miles (140 kilometers) from New York City to Philadelphia. That was longer than it now takes to fly around the world. There were only 11 states in the Union when Washington became president. There were 16 when he left office.

Many stories have been told about Washington. Most are probably not true. So far as we know, he did not chop down his father's cherry tree, then confess by saying: "I cannot tell a lie, Pa." He probably never threw a stone across the Rappahannock River. But such stories show that people were willing to believe almost anything about his honesty and his strength. One of Washington's officers, Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, summed up the way Americans felt and still feel about Washington: "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

**JOHN ADAMS**

**John Adams** (1735-1826), guided the young United States through some of its most serious troubles. He served under George Washington as the first vice president, and followed him as the second president. The United States government moved from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., during Adams's administration, and he became the first president to live in the White House. Adams was the first chief executive whose son also served as president.

Adams played a leading role in the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, and was a signer of the historic document. He had spoken out boldly for separation from Great Britain (now called the United Kingdom) at a time when most colonial leaders still hoped to settle their differences with the British. As president, Adams fought a split in his own party over his determination to avoid war with France. He kept the peace, but in the process he lost a second term as president. Adams was succeeded by Thomas Jefferson.

In appearance, Adams was short and stout, with a ruddy complexion. He seldom achieved popularity during his long political career. Those close to him loved him, but his bluntness, impatience, and vanity made more enemies than friends. On most great decisions of his public career, history has proved him right and his opponents wrong. But his clumsiness in human relations often caused him to be misunderstood. Few people knew about another part of Adams's personality. His diary and personal letters show his pleasant, affectionate, and often playful nature.

During Adams's term, the United States took its first steps toward industrialization. The first woolen mills began operating in Massachusetts, and Congress established the Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps. Americans enjoyed such songs as "The Wearing of the Green" and "The Blue Bells of Scotland." People read and admired *The Life and Memorable Actions of George Washington* by Mason Locke Weems. On the frontier, Johnny Appleseed began wandering through Ohio and Indiana, planting apple seeds and teaching the Bible.

**THOMAS JEFFERSON**

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), was the third president of the United States. He was also a leading figure in America’s movement toward independence and development as a nation. Jefferson was a tall man with red hair. He was a native of central Virginia, where he became a leading lawyer and plantation owner. During the American Revolution (1775-1783), he rose to a position of leadership in both his state and the nation, most famously as the author of the Declaration of Independence. After the Americans won independence from Great Britain (later also called the United Kingdom), Jefferson held political office almost continuously until his retirement in 1809. He was president of the United States from 1801 to 1809. His presidency was a period of tremendous growth for the nation.

In addition to his two terms as president, Jefferson served in many other offices. He was a member of the Virginia legislature, a delegate to the Continental Congress, governor of Virginia, U.S. minister to France, U.S. secretary of state, and vice president of the United States. He also was a lifelong supporter of the arts, sciences, and education.

Jefferson was greatly influenced by the ideas of the English philosopher John Locke. Locke emphasized basic human rights and believed that people should revolt against governments that violated those rights. Jefferson also was influenced by such political writers as James Harrington and Algernon Sidney of England and Montesquieu of France. Historians often disagree over which thinkers affected Jefferson the most.

Jefferson’s defenses of individual liberty and representative government continue to inspire people today. The term Jeffersonian democracy has come to refer to Jefferson’s ideal of rule by the people with minimum government interference. Jefferson felt that local governments—those closest to the people being governed—should be the most powerful. He felt that distant general governments should have only limited powers. Jefferson argued for freedom of speech, of the press, and of religion. He pressed for the addition of a bill of rights to the Constitution of the United States. However, many modern critics point out that, despite his public support for civil liberties, Jefferson held slaves throughout his adult life.

Beyond politics, Jefferson's interests and talents were wide-ranging. He was one of the leading American architects of his time, designing the Virginia Capitol, the University of Virginia, and his own home, Monticello (see Monticello). He greatly appreciated art and music and encouraged their advancement in the United States. Jefferson also served as president of the American Philosophical Society, an organization that encouraged a wide range of scientific and intellectual research.

**ABIGAIL ADAMS**

Abigail Adams (1744-1818), was the wife of John Adams, who served as president of the United States from 1797 to 1801. She was the mother of John Quincy Adams, who also became president—serving from 1825 to 1829. Abigail Adams is known for writing many letters expressing her opinions about the society of the time. Her delightful letters to her husband during his absences from home are valued today for the picture they give of colonial times. She is also known as an early supporter of women's rights.

Mrs. Adams was born on Nov. 22, 1744, in Weymouth, Massachusetts. (The date was November 11 by the calendar then in use.) Her maiden name was Abigail Smith. Her father, William Smith, was a Congregational minister who came from a prosperous family of merchants. Her mother, Elizabeth Quincy Smith, came from one of most prominent families of Braintree (now Quincy), Massachusetts. Poor health kept Abigail from getting even the little schooling that was available to girls during colonial times. But her family had a large private library. Abigail read widely and became one of the best-informed women of her time.

Abigail Smith and John Adams married on Oct. 25, 1764. The couple had five children—Abigail, John Quincy, Susanna, Charles, and Thomas.

Mrs. Adams managed the family farm in Braintree while her husband served in the Continental Congress and as a diplomat in Europe during the 1770's and 1780's. Her support of women's rights included calls for more schooling for girls. Writing to her husband in Philadelphia in 1776, she urged him to "remember the ladies" in the new nation's laws. She also opposed slavery, which then existed in the country.

During the Revolutionary War in America (1775-1783), Abigail Adams's letters to her husband provided valuable information about British troops and ships in the Boston area. In November 1800, near the end of President Adams's term, his family became the first occupants of the White House. At the time, the interior of the mansion was far from complete. Mrs. Adams often had the family wash hung to dry in the East Room of the White House because there was no other place she considered suitable. Abigail Adams died on Oct. 28, 1818.

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), was a jack-of-all-trades and master of many. No other American, except possibly Thomas Jefferson, has done so many things so well. During his long and useful life, Franklin concerned himself with such different matters as statesmanship and soapmaking, book-printing and cabbage-growing, and the rise of tides and the fall of empires. He also invented an efficient heating stove and proved that lightning is a huge electric spark.

As a statesman, Franklin stood in the front rank of the people who built the United States. He was the only person who signed all four of these key documents in American history: the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Alliance with France, the Treaty of Paris that made peace with Great Britain (now also called the United Kingdom), and the Constitution of the United States. Franklin’s services as a diplomat in France helped greatly in winning the Revolutionary War in America (1775-1783). He successfully convinced France to enter the war against Great Britain. Many historians consider him the ablest and most successful diplomat that America has ever sent abroad.

Franklin was a leader of his day in the study of electricity. As an inventor, he was unequaled in the United States until the time of Thomas A. Edison. People still read The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (1789) and quote sayings from Franklin’s Poor Richard’s Almanac (1733-1758). Franklin also helped establish Pennsylvania's first university and America's first city hospital.

Franklin's fame extended to Europe as well as America. Thomas Jefferson hailed him as "the greatest man and ornament of the age and country in which he lived." A French statesman, Comte de Mirabeau, referred to Franklin as "the sage whom two worlds claimed as their own."

**BENEDICT ARNOLD**

Benedict Arnold (1741-1801), was an American general of the Revolutionary War period. Once trusted and admired, he became the most famous traitor in United States history.

In 1774, Arnold became a captain in the Connecticut militia. Soon after the Revolutionary War began in 1775, he was commissioned as a colonel in the patriot forces. Arnold and Ethan Allen led the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, in New York, on May 10, 1775.

Later that year, Arnold led 1,100 soldiers into Canada. He cooperated with General Richard Montgomery in an unsuccessful assault on Quebec. Arnold's leg was severely wounded in the assault, and his courage won him a promotion to brigadier general. In October 1776, he distinguished himself during the Battle of Valcour Island, a naval battle on Lake Champlain.

Arnold had several disappointments. He was passed over for promotion in February 1777, when Congress appointed five new major generals. Arnold, who had more seniority than any of the men promoted, was talked out of leaving the army by General George Washington. In May 1777, Congress promoted Arnold to major general as a reward for his bravery in helping drive a British raiding party out of Connecticut.

Later that year, Arnold served under General Horatio Gates against the British general John Burgoyne. In October 1777, in the Second Battle of Freeman's Farm, Arnold showed gallant courage against Burgoyne and was again seriously wounded. This battle, won by the patriots, is also known as the Battle of Bemis Heights. The patriot victory led to Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga several days later. Gates received credit for the victory. Congress voted Arnold the country's thanks and had Washington restore Arnold's seniority over the other generals.

In 1778, Arnold took command of Philadelphia. There he married Margaret Shippen, a young woman from a prominent family. Arnold was not a good administrator, and he drew criticism for living extravagantly. The executive council of Pennsylvania accused him of being too gentle with Americans who opposed independence from the United Kingdom. The council also accused him of using military personnel to do personal favors. A court-martial cleared Arnold, but it ordered General Washington to reprimand him.

Arnold brooded over what he considered his country's ingratitude and injustice, and he began corresponding with the enemy. Arnold was in command of West Point in 1780, and he worked out a plan to surrender that important military base to the British commander Sir Henry Clinton.

The capture of British Major John Andre, who was carrying papers sent by Arnold to Clinton, exposed Arnold's treachery (see Andre, John). Arnold escaped to New York City and became a brigadier general in the British Army. He demanded 20,000 pounds from the British for the losses he incurred in joining them. But he received only 6,315 pounds. As a British officer, he led expeditions that burned Richmond, Virginia, and New London, Connecticut.

**JOHN HANCOCK**

John Hancock (1737-1793), was an American revolutionary leader who became the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence in 1776. His bold signature is still famous. Today, when people sign their names, they are said to have written their John Hancock.

Hancock was born on Jan. 23, 1737 (Jan. 12, 1737, according to the calendar then in use), in Braintree (now Quincy), Massachusetts, where his father was a minister. His father died when John was a boy, and his uncle, Thomas Hancock, one of the wealthiest merchants in Boston, adopted him. After his graduation from Harvard College in 1754, John joined his uncle in business. He inherited the company after his uncle's death in 1764.

Hancock became known as a revolutionary after an incident called the Liberty Affair in 1768. One of his vessels, the Liberty, arrived in Boston Harbor to unload a shipment of wine and take on new cargo. British customs officials seized the Liberty, charging that Hancock had disobeyed regulations. This action enraged the citizens of Boston. Mobs rioted, and the British government sent troops to restore order. The Liberty Affair became one of the events that led to the Revolutionary War.

In 1769, Hancock had won election to the Massachusetts General Court, the lower house of the colonial legislature. The General Court became the Massachusetts Provincial Congress in 1774, and Hancock served as its president in 1774 and 1775.

As tensions between the Americans and the British grew, Hancock used his wealth and influence in the movement for independence. His activities caused the British to regard him as one of the most dangerous revolutionaries. He and Samuel Adams, another Massachusetts leader, were nearly arrested by the British in 1775. But the famous ride by their fellow patriot Paul Revere gave them warning and enabled them to escape.

Hancock served as president of the Continental Congress from 1775 to 1777. As president, he was the first to sign the Declaration of Independence adopted by the Congress. Hancock hoped to command the Continental Army that fought for independence during the Revolutionary War. He was disappointed that the Congress chose George Washington. In 1778, however, Hancock led about 5,000 Massachusetts soldiers in an unsuccessful attempt to free Rhode Island from the British.

Hancock presided over the convention that adopted the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780, and he became the first governor under the new charter. He served nine terms as governor, from 1780 to 1785, and from 1787 until his death in 1793.

**DEBORAH SAMPSON**

Deborah Sampson (1760-1827), served in the Revolutionary War in America disguised as a man. In May 1782, she enlisted in the 4th Massachusetts Regiment of the American army as Robert Shurtleff. Sampson fought in several battles and was wounded at least twice. She hid a leg wound so doctors would not discover she was a woman. About June 1783, Sampson was hospitalized in Philadelphia because of a high fever, and her identity was discovered. General George Washington ordered that she be given an honorable discharge.

Deborah Sampson was born on Dec. 17, 1760, in Plympton, Massachusetts. Before enlisting, she had been a teacher. A book about her army experiences, *The Female Review*, was published in 1797. In 1805, the United States Congress awarded her a pension because of her military service and wounds. She died on April 29, 1827.

**THOMAS PAINE**

Thomas Paine (1737-1809), was a famous pamphleteer, agitator, and writer on politics and religion. His writings greatly influenced the political thinking of the leaders of the American Revolution (1775-1783), and he became a famous figure in Paris during the French Revolution (1789-1799). "I know not," wrote former President John Adams in 1806, "whether any man in the world has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Thomas Paine."

Paine's opinions and personality aroused strong feelings in others. Some admired him greatly, but others hated him fiercely. Many historians regard Paine, as he regarded himself, as a patriot who did much for America and asked nothing in return. He stated clearly and concisely political ideas that others accepted and supported. Yet Paine died a social outcast.

Paine was unemployed and poor in 1774, but he was also socially connected. He gained the friendship of Benjamin Franklin, then in London, who advised him to go to America.

Paine arrived in America with letters of recommendation from Franklin. Paine soon became contributing editor to the Pennsylvania Magazine, and he began working for the cause of independence. In 1776, he published his pamphlet *Common Sense*, a brilliant statement of the colonists’ cause. This pamphlet demanded complete independence from Britain and the establishment of a strong federal union. It also attacked the idea of monarchy and inherited privilege. Paine asserted that the American Revolution would begin a new era in world history. “The birthday of a new world is at hand,” he wrote. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other colonial leaders read the pamphlet, as did hundreds of thousands of ordinary Americans. Common Sense became the most widely circulated pamphlet in American history to that time.

In December 1776, Paine followed Common Sense with a series of pamphlets called *The American Crisis*. The first of these pamphlets began, "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country. ... Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered." Washington had the pamphlet read aloud to his soldiers. Paine's bold, clear words encouraged the Continental Army during the darkest days of the war.

Paine served as a soldier in 1776. He also worked with a group of Pennsylvanians to create a democratic constitution for the state. In April 1777, he became secretary to the Congressional Committee of Foreign Affairs. In exposing questionable actions by Silas Deane, the American commissioner to France, Paine also exposed diplomatic secrets. This earned him powerful enemies, and Paine was forced to resign his position.

**PATRICK HENRY**

Henry, Patrick (1736-1799), was a distinguished statesman, lawyer, and orator at the time of the Revolutionary War in America. He is remembered most for the words, "Give me liberty or give me death," which, according to tradition, he spoke in 1775 before the Virginia Provincial Convention. Henry was urging that the Virginia militia be armed for defense of the colony against England. A man who heard many of Henry's speeches once said of the orator: "He is by far the most powerful speaker I ever heard. Every word he says not only engages but commands the attention." Henry was also an excellent politician and administrator. Henry served as the governor of Virginia during the Revolutionary War.

Henry was born on May 29, 1736, in Hanover County, Virginia. He attended public school for only a short time, but was taught by his father, who had a good education. As a young man, Henry was a storekeeper for a time. But he was a poor businessman and, as a result, he was soon hopelessly in debt. He then studied law and received his license to practice in 1760. Three years later, Henry's talent as an orator won him fame in Virginia in a noted lawsuit called the Parson's Cause.

In 1764, Henry was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. He soon became a leader, supporting frontier interests against the old aristocracy. He upheld the rights which the colonies were guaranteed by their charters. His speech against the Stamp Act in 1765 is one of his greatest orations (see [Stamp Act](http://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar528680)). In it, according to tradition, appear the often-quoted words: "Caesar had his Brutus—Charles the First, his Cromwell—and George the Third—*may profit by their example.* If *this* be treason, make the most of it."

In August 1774, the colony of Virginia elected Henry a delegate to the First Continental Congress (see [Continental Congress](http://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar131500)). He was also a member of the Second Continental Congress for a short time in 1775. After that, he became commander in chief of Virginia's military forces. He resigned this post in February 1776. A few months later, he was chosen a member of the committee to draw up the first constitution of the commonwealth of Virginia.