

George Washington (1732-1799)

Highest Political Office: President (1789-1797)

Other Accomplishments: Led the colonial forces in the Revolutionary War

He said portraits of George Washington accurately reflect the personality of the father of the nation. He was a man of few words, whose political ascension was attributable to his strength of character, rather than his intellect.

A huge man for his day, Washington stood 6' 3 1/2" tall with enormous hands. Washington had pockmarked skin as a result of a teenage case of smallpox, and a shy disposition that was the result of a domineering mother. Twice he proposed to women, and twice he was rejected. He finally married Martha Custis, the richest widow in Virginia.

He had lost almost all his teeth by the time he was president, leaving him with badly sunken cheeks that were stuffed with cotton for portraits. Contrary to popular belief, George Washington never had wooden teeth! His teeth were made mostly of lead fitted with human, cattle, and hippopotamus teeth. Some were carved from elephant and walrus tusks.

In his will, he freed all 300 of his slaves permanently.

The popular tale of Washington and the cherry tree, historians say, was almost certainly untrue.

His Politics: Washington was a Federalist, so he favored a strong central government. He also had a strong affinity for aristocrats. During the Constitutional Convention, he spent much of his time at the mansion of Robert Morris, the richest man in America. His closest political ally was Alexander Hamilton, whose policies inevitably leaned toward the upper classes.

Washington was the only president to win unanimous approval (all of the votes cast) by the electoral college. He did it twice.

In office, Washington served the nation best by keeping the government stable. He advocated a strong national defense, and kept the country out of the escalating tension between England and France.

His health failing, Washington begged out of the presidency after one term. Men from both sides of the political fence urged him to remain in office, however, so he stayed on. His second inaugural address may reveal his enthusiasm for the second term. At 135 words, it is the shortest inaugural address in history.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers: Alexander Hamilton

What He Said: "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence—it is a force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master; never for a moment should it be left to irresponsible action."

James Madison (1751-1836)

Highest Political Office: President (1809-1817)

Other Accomplishments: helped draft Virginia's state constitution when he was 25. That document later became the model for the U.S. Constitution. Served as Jefferson's Secretary of State.

Madison was a soft-spoken and tiny man—about 5'4" and less than 100 pounds. Even his nickname was diminutive: "Jemmy." He was too small to serve in the Revolutionary War, and turned to politics instead.

Madison, "the Father of the Constitution"—the most important legal document in modern history—never received a law degree.

Even in his 40s, Madison was a lonely and single man. That changed when Aaron Burr introduced him to Dolley Todd. The couple married when Madison was 43, and never had children.

Dolley Madison earned a place in history when she stole away from the White House with crucial government documents and a portrait of George Washington as the British stormed the capital during the War of 1812.

Madison was the last Founding Father to die at the age of eighty-five in June, 1836.

His Politics: His presidency was marred by the War of 1812—the only war in which U.S. soil was overrun by enemy forces. The war was precipitated by the widespread sentiment that the U.S. was destined to conquer Canada, then a British territory.

Aside from the war that nearly cost him his reelection, Madison's two terms were also memorable for the fact that both of his vice presidents died while in office.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers:

Jefferson and Madison were close friends throughout their lives: Madison was Jefferson's protégé. After their presidencies, each spent many days at the other's estate. Jefferson named one of the bedrooms at Monticello "Mr. Madison's room."

What He Said: On the War of 1812: "I flung forward the flag of the country, sure that the people would press onward and defend it." Under the new Constitution, the nation's powers will be "derived from the superior power of the people."

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Highest Political Office: President (1801-1809)

Other Accomplishments: Wrote the Declaration of Independence, served as Minister to France (a pivotal diplomatic position) as the Constitution was being drafted.

Jefferson was nicknamed “Long Tom” because he stood 6’ 2 1/2” tall, with long, slender limbs. He had carrot-red hair that paled with age. A fiddle player, Jefferson wooed his wife with violin serenades. Jefferson eschewed the uniforms of nobility, choosing instead to dress himself in sometimes dirty and tattered clothing.

Although his wife died at the age of 33, Jefferson never remarried. He did, however, allegedly father five children by Sally Hemings, one of his slaves.

Jefferson suffered from migraine headaches throughout his life, and bathed his feet in cold water daily to avoid colds.

Jefferson was the quintessential Renaissance man and has been described as a(n): lawyer, linguist, diplomat, astronomer, naturalist, political philosopher, educator, statesman, president, “farmer,” musician, scientist, inventor, agriculturalist, horseman, geographer, theologian and paleontologist. Jefferson was fluent in Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, German, and was a supporter of equal rights and education for women, the right of all to have a free public education, a free library system and the creation of decimal system of weights and measures. He is also considered one of the preeminent architects in the history of the country.

His Politics: Jefferson was a Republican, which at that time was the party of the common man. He envisioned a nation built on agriculture, not industry. The formal name for the “Republican” Party of Jefferson was the Democratic-Republican Party from which our present day Democratic party evolved. (The Republican party of today was created in 1854 by the joining of anti-slavery Democrats, the Free Soil Party and factions of the

Whig Party.) The formal name of the opposing party (led by Alexander Hamilton) was the Federalist Party.

Jefferson was renowned for being a terrible public speaker due to a speech impediment, although he is certainly regarded as one of the most facile writers ever to hold the office of the presidency. He alone wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence.

He doubled the land size of the United States when he made the Louisiana Purchase from Napoleon. Napoleon needed cash to conquer Europe; Jefferson wanted the land to safeguard against a future French invasion and to encourage his vision of American being a land of small independent (yeoman) farmers. The selling price: \$15 million.

After his two terms as president, Jefferson retired to his Virginia estate, Monticello. He spent much of his time pursuing his dream of establishing a university. That dream was realized when he founded the University of Virginia.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers:

Although his closest friend among the founding fathers was James Madison, Jefferson’s most memorable friendship was with John Adams. The friendship developed when they both worked on the committee that was responsible for the Declaration of Independence. Their friendship turned to a bitter rivalry, however, when they joined opposing political parties. They reconciled after both finished their presidencies, and they kept up a steady correspondence. They both died on July 4, 1826—50 years to the day after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. On the day he died, Adams opened his eyes and whispered his last words: “Thomas Jefferson lives,” he said. Jefferson had died earlier that day.

What He Said: “A little rebellion now and then is a good thing.” “Science is my passion, politics my duty.”

John Adams (1735-1826)

Highest Political Office: President (1797-1801)

Other Accomplishments: First vice-president. Helped draft the Declaration of Independence and negotiate the peace agreement with Great Britain to end the Revolutionary War. Served as Minister to Great Britain.

Nicknamed “Atlas of American Independence,” John Adams was a short (5’7”), plump man with an ego as big as his waistline. He felt it was beneath him to shake hands with anyone; he bowed instead. Adams was not alone in this practice, however. George Washington also preferred to bow rather than shake hands.

Born and raised in what is now Quincy, Massachusetts, Adams was a lawyer by trade. He was the longest living American president. He died at the age of 90, in Quincy. Adams was the first president to occupy the White House. The nation moved its capital from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., during his administration.

His Politics: Adams was a Federalist, and, as such, he held a more elitist view of government than his Republican rivals.

The first truly defense-minded president, Adams built the U.S. Navy to the point where it could compete with that of any nation.

Probably his most enduring political legacy was that he appointed John Marshall as Supreme Court Chief Justice. His most ignominious political legacy was his signing of the “Alien and Sedition Acts,” which made it a crime to criticize the government (violators could be imprisoned).

Adams was most proud of the fact that he avoided war with France at the turn of the century, in the face of strong public opinion in favor of war. This, along with his perceived overspending on defense, led to his defeat in his re-election campaign.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers: Thomas Jefferson was, by turns, both his closest crony and most loathed political enemy. They ended their lives as friends, dying on the same day, 50 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence (see fascinating facts about Thomas Jefferson).

What He Said: “Let the human mind loose. It must be loosed. It will be loose. Superstition and despotism cannot confine it.”

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Highest Political Office: Minister to France

Other Accomplishments: Franklin was one of the three Americans to sign the peace treaty with England that ended the Revolutionary War. He also helped write the Declaration of Independence, and was the oldest delegate at the Constitutional Convention.

Of the Founding Fathers, Franklin was easily the most unusual character. He made enough money from his publishing business—primarily on receipts from Poor Richard's Almanac—to retire at age 42. He then devoted his life to writing, science, and politics.

Among his many inventions, Franklin created bifocal glasses. He did so because he didn't like to carry two pairs of glasses with him.

Franklin had one illegitimate son, William, who became the Governor of New Jersey. William supported the British in the Revolution. That move resulted in the permanent estrangement of father and son.

His Politics: Franklin's political activism had peaked long before the American party system fully evolved, but he was philosophically closer to the tenets of the Democratic-Republican party.

He was suspicious of strong central governments and governors, be they kings or presidents. Indeed, Franklin advocated a three-person presidential committee rather than having a single president. Of the proposal to have a one-man president, he said, "The government is likely to be well-administered for a course of years, and can only end in despotism." Nonetheless, in Franklin's will, he bequeathed his walking stick to president Washington.

Franklin had a restless and ravenous mind. He eschewed normal work patterns, preferring instead to set his own pace, and ignoring appointments if he was interested enough in a conversation. He also possessed the largest private library in America. Not all of his ideas won wide acceptance. A case in point: Franklin's choice for the national bird was the turkey.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers:

Thomas Jefferson. When Franklin died, Jefferson implored President Washington to hold a day of mourning. Washington balked, not wishing to set a precedent.

What He Said: "Our Constitution is in actual operation. Everything appears to promise that it will last. But in this world nothing is certain but death and taxes." At the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention Franklin observed the symbol of the sun at the top of George Washington's chair and mused: "I have the happiness to know it is a rising sun and not a setting sun"

Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804)

Highest Political Office: Treasury Secretary

Other Accomplishments: Along with Madison and John Jay, authored the Federalist Papers, rallying support for the new Constitution. Led the effort to convene the Constitutional Convention when the nation was verging on anarchy.

Hamilton called for a meeting of all 13 states at Annapolis, Maryland in September, 1786 to discuss the economic situation in the country at that time. However, only five states sent representatives. There were not enough states for a quorum and the conference had no real authority. Undaunted, Hamilton then requested permission from the Congress of the Confederation (under the Articles of Confederation) to invite representatives from the thirteen states to assemble in Philadelphia with the express purpose of “revising” the Articles of Confederation. Behind closed doors and with no real authority, the delegates decided to write an entirely new constitution.

Hamilton was consumed by his passion for a nation built around a strong and fiscally stable central government. He was born out of wedlock in the West Indies, and moved to the colonies at the age of 17. His father, a Scottish trader, went bankrupt when Hamilton was 15, and the boy went to work in a counting house to help support the family.

Fresh out of Columbia University, he organized artillery regiments in New York for the Revolutionary War, and from 1779 to 1781 he was Washington’s chief aide. When Washington assumed the presidency, he named Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury.

Ironically, before Washington was elected president, Hamilton was one of a group of politicians who felt that the U.S. needed a king. The group wrote to Prussia’s Prince Henry and asked if he wanted the job. Before he replied, the group changed its mind.

His Politics: Hamilton was the one who most advocated an elitist political vision. He believed that the intellectual aristocracy should rule the nation.

Hamilton’s political legacy is embodied in the Federal Bank. He led the effort to establish the first such bank, which he saw as critical for sustaining the government’s fragile finances. His opponents saw the bank as an evil tool for expanding the power of the federal government, at the expense of the states. Hamilton is regarded as the “Father of the National Debt” because he felt that a national debt was really a “blessing.” The more money the government owed to the people of the country, the more the people had a stake in the success of the country!

When Jefferson ran for president in 1800, he and Aaron Burr (both Republicans) tied. The election went to the Federalist-controlled House. Hamilton, founder of the Federalist party, convinced his colleagues to elect Jefferson over Burr. Burr then campaigned for governor of New York. Again, Hamilton swayed voters against Burr. Finally, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. Fatally wounded by his rival, Hamilton died one day later.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers: George Washington

What He Said: “The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the Divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.”

George Mason (1725-1792)

Highest Political Office: Member, Virginia Constitutional Convention (1776) Delegate, Constitutional Convention (1787)

Other Accomplishments: Helped create the Virginia Bill of Rights and Virginia Constitution.

Although George Mason refused to sign the Constitution, his ideas still had a major effect on the fabric of American political thought. He was one of the richest planters in Virginia and was involved early in his life with western land speculation. Mason served for a brief time in the Virginia House of Burgesses along with his close friend, George Washington. He was more concerned with the types of public duties that did not bring the kind of recognition that his contemporaries were interested in. However, he was one of the most fundamental thinkers of the American Revolution and formed a close philosophical alliance with Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, James Madison, and George Washington.

His Politics: Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was influenced greatly by Mason's work on the Virginia bill of rights, and Mason's ideas also had an impact on the development of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution. He eventually opposed the Constitution because of the compromise concerning slavery (known as the 3/5 Compromise) and the failure of the delegates to include a Bill of Rights. These objections to the Constitution became the focal point for the anti-federalists during the ratification process. He was chosen the first Senator from Virginia but refused the seat in 1789. Mason has been called the American example of the Enlightenment.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers: George Washington, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson

What He Said: "It is easy to foresee that there will be much difficulty in organizing a government upon this great scale, and at the same time reserving to the state legislatures a sufficient portion of power for promoting and securing the prosperity and happiness of their respective citizens. Yet, with a proper degree of coolness, liberality, and candour (very rare commodities by the bye) I doubt not but that it may be effected."

Gouverneur Morris (1725-1816)

Highest Political Office: U.S. Minister to England (1790-1791); U.S. Minister to France (1792-1794); United States Senator (1800-1803)

Other Accomplishments: Signer of the Articles of Confederation; Member, Continental Congress (1777-1778); Assistant Minister of Finance (1781-1785); Member of the Constitutional Convention (1787); Chairman of the Erie Canal Commission (1810-1813).

During his lifetime, Gouverneur Morris was a successful politician, diplomat and writer. He was a strong supporter of the federal constitution although he was not a strong supporter of the “power” of the people (he initially opposed the American Revolution because he felt it was controlled by the “mob”). He had a wooden leg due to a carriage accident.

His Politics: He was in favor of senators being chosen for life, significant property qualifications to vote, direct election of the president by the elite qualified voters, and representation in Congress based on taxation. “The mob begin to think and reason. Poor reptiles! They bask in the sun, and ere noon they will bite, depend on it. The gentry begin to fear this.” It has been recorded that Gouverneur Morris spoke more than anyone at the Constitutional Convention (173 times). He was made the chairman of the Committee of Style and was responsible for the “wording” of the Constitution. He took twenty-three proposed resolutions and condensed them into the seven major articles contained in the Constitution. Morris declined Alexander Hamilton’s request to help write the Federalist Papers, and during the “fight” for ratification he played no significant part. After Alexander Hamilton was killed by Aaron Burr in 1804, Morris prepared the eulogy.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers: Alexander Hamilton, George Washington

What He Said: “I cannot conceive of a government in which there can exist two supremes.”

“I came here (to the Constitutional Convention) as a representative of America. I flatter myself that I came here in some degree as a representative of the whole human race.”

Roger Sherman (1721-1793)

Highest Political Office: United States House of Representatives (1788-1791); United States Senator (1791-1793).

Other Accomplishments: Member, Continental Congress (1774-1781, 1783 and 1784); Helped draft the Declaration of Independence; Helped draft the Articles of Confederation; Was responsible for the Great Compromise (Connecticut Compromise) at the Constitutional Convention.

Sherman was a self-made man, married twice and fathered fifteen children. Before the Revolutionary War he held positions in the Connecticut government in all three branches (legislative, executive, and judicial). He was a political conservative, but strongly favored the American Revolution once it began. Sherman was in support of the colonial boycotts of the 1760's and was in charge of the New Haven committees of correspondence (organizations that promoted inter-colonial communication). He was not known as a gifted speaker, but he toiled hard in various committees in order to make sound and lasting policy. However, at the Constitutional Convention he did speak 138 times on various issues, and only James Madison, James Wilson, and Gouverneur Morris spoke more often. Roger Sherman was the second oldest delegate there (right behind 81 year old Benjamin Franklin). Thomas Jefferson once remarked, "There is Mr. Sherman of Connecticut, who never said a foolish thing in his life."

His Politics: He was in favor of the President being appointed by the Legislature for a three year term of office. However, his most important accomplishment was the compromise on representation in Congress he suggested that broke the "deadlock" between large and small states. This compromise was called the "Great Compromise", and it showed the delegates that they could and should compromise in order to accomplish the writing of a new constitution. Thus, the Constitution has been characterized historically as a "bundle of compromises". He was, however, opposed to a separate "bill of rights" to be added to the Constitution. By the time Sherman served in the United States Congress he was an advocate of the Federalist philosophy. He ended up supporting Alexander Hamilton's financial program of assumption of state debts, the establishment of a national bank, and enactment of a tariff to help the young nation to stabilize its economy.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers: William Johnson

What He Said: "The question is, not what rights naturally belong to man, but how they may be most equally and effectually guarded in society."

"When you are in a minority, talk; when you are in a majority, vote."

James Wilson (1742-1798)

Highest Political Office: Associate Justice, United States Supreme Court

Other Accomplishments: Member, Continental Congress (1775-1777; 1782; 1783; 1785-1787); Signer of the Declaration of Independence; First Professor of Law at Philadelphia College (1790).

James Wilson was an early supporter of the American Revolution and gained much notoriety with the publication of his "Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament". However, he became very conservative in his later years and was the target of public indignation. He was born in Scotland, came to New York during the time of the Stamp Act (1765), and eventually studied law under John Dickinson in Pennsylvania. He eventually became the first professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania in 1791.

It was said of James Wilson that "when Wilson speaks, he wastes no time and considers no man's feelings."

His Politics: He emerged as a political leader after the American Revolutionary War, and as a member of the Congress of the Confederation (1783; 1785-1786) under the Articles of Confederation was strongly in favor of an amendment to permit the government the power to tax.

He was a strong supporter of a republican form of government in which the people choose the representatives in government, and was in favor of the "power" of the people during a time period when many of the political visionaries did not believe in democracy. The democracy that we know today did not really take

shape until the 1820's with the advent of Andrew Jackson. Wilson felt that people and their individual rights took priority over those of property rights, and was opposed to slavery. He also believed in the concept of "federalism" in which there was a division of power between the states and national government. However, the final authority ultimately went to the central government. At the Constitutional Convention he was a leader of the many floor debates and a member of the committee chosen to draft the Constitution. He then led the fight for ratification in Pennsylvania, which became the second state to approve the new Constitution.

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers:

John Rutledge

What He Said: "The government ought to possess not only first the force but secondly the mind or sense of the people at large. The legislature ought to be the most exact transcript of the whole society."

"Why should a national government be unpopular? Will a citizen of Delaware be degraded by becoming a citizen of the United States?"

"Federal liberty is to states what civil liberty is to individuals ... I do not see the danger of the states being devoured by the national government." On the contrary, I wish to keep them from devouring the national government."

Edmund Randolph (1753-1813)

Highest Political Office: U.S. Attorney General and U.S. Secretary of State

Other Accomplishments: Helped draft the constitution for the state of Virginia; Member, Continental Congress (1779-1782); Governor of Virginia (1786-1788); Member, Virginia Ratification Convention; chief counsel for Aaron Burr during his treason trial (1807).

Edmund Randolph graduated from the College of William and Mary and practiced law until the American Revolutionary War disrupted his personal and professional life. At the outbreak of the war in 1775, his father, mother, and sisters moved back to England. Randolph supported the rebellion and served for a short time as an aid to General George Washington, but soon returned to Virginia to become the youngest member of the convention to write Virginia's state constitution. He then became the mayor of Williamsburg and later the "state's" attorney general.

His Politics: Randolph's political experience also involved becoming a member of the Continental Congress, Governor of Virginia, and a delegate to the Annapolis Convention of 1786.

He was chosen to be a delegate to the U.S. Constitutional Convention in 1787, and is best known for presenting a proposal supporting the large states

known as the Virginia Plan. The plan called for a bicameral legislative body and each state represented by population with the first house (representatives) elected by the people and the second house (senators) elected by the first house. The Virginia Plan eventually became part of the Great Compromise or Connecticut Compromise submitted by Roger Sherman. He also wanted a committee of three to act as president. Randolph also served on the Committee on Detail that prepared a first draft of the new constitution. However, because of philosophical differences over the final Constitution, he refused to sign it. He did eventually support its ratification when the agreement was made to include amendments to protect the rights of individuals and the states (Bill of Rights). Randolph referred to the Constitution as "the anchor of our political salvation".

Closest Crony Among the Founding Fathers:
Thomas Jefferson

What He Said: "There are great reasons when persons with limited powers are justified in exceeding them, and a person would be contemptible not to risk it."



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