

Fascinating Facts About The Founding Fathers

Once Gouverneur Morris was offered a bet of one dinner if he would approach George Washington, slap him on the back and give him a friendly greeting. He wanted to show people how “close” he was to the “chief.” Morris carried out the bet, but later admitted that after seeing the cold stare from Washington, he wouldn’t do it again for a thousand dinners!

George Washington was born on February 11, 1732, but in 1751 Great Britain changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. An act of Parliament added eleven days to make the adjustment complete and in 1752 Washington celebrated his birthday on February 22!

Of the Founding Fathers who became president, only George Washington did not go to college. John Adams graduated from Harvard, James Madison graduated from Princeton, and Thomas Jefferson attended the College of William and Mary.

John Adams was the first President to live in the White House when he came to Washington, D.C. in November of 1800. However, he was only there for four months after losing the election of 1800 to Thomas Jefferson.

George Washington gave the shortest inauguration speech in American history on March 4, 1793. It was only 133 words long. William Henry Harrison gave the longest at 8,443 words on March 4, 1841 on a cold and blustery day in Washington, D.C.. He died one month later of a severe cold.

Thomas Jefferson has been described as a(n): agriculturalist, anthropologist, architect, astronomer, bibliophile, botanist, classicist, diplomat, educator, ethnologist, farmer, geographer, gourmet, horseman, horticulturist, inventor, lawyer, lexicographer, linguist, mathematician, meteorologist, musician, naturalist, numismatist, paleontologist, philosopher, political philosopher, scientist, statesman, violinist, writer. He was also fluent in Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and German!

Upon graduating from Harvard, John Adams became a grammar school teacher. “My little school, like the great world, is made up of Kings, politicians, divines, fops, buffoons, fiddlers, fools, coxcombs, sycophants, chimney sweeps, and every other character I see in the world. I would rather sit in school and consider which of my pupils will turn out be a hero, and which a rake, which a philosopher and which a parasite, than to have an income of a thousand pounds a year.”

Washington Irving described James Madison as “a withered little applejohn” and his wife Dolley as a “fine, portly, buxom dame.”

The Marquis de Lafayette thought so much of George Washington that he named his son George Washington Lafayette.

Thomas Jefferson died broke. Before his death, Jefferson was able to alleviate part of his financial problems by accepting \$25,000 for his books from Congress. Those books were used to begin the Library of Congress. Friends even tried to organize a lottery to sell part of his land to help, but it was not enough.



The Founding Fathers: Fascinating Facts *(Continued)*

When Jefferson died, he left “my gold mounted walking staff of animal horn as a token of cordial and affectionate friendship” to James Madison. Jefferson's epitaph read: “Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, of the statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and the father of the University of Virginia.” It didn't include “President of the United States”!

John Adams was the only president to be the father of a future president (John Quincy Adams) until George W. Bush became president in 2000, making George Bush Sr. the second president to have a son who was elected president.

Thomas Jefferson sometimes spent \$50 a day (about \$846 today) for groceries because of his lavish entertaining. The wine bill for the eight years he served as president was \$11,000 (about \$186,000 today!). He was also the first President to grow tomatoes in North America.

John Adams died on July 4, 1826, at the age of 90 years, 247 days. He had the longest marriage of any ex-president. He and Abigail were married on October 25, 1764, and the marriage lasted 54 years (his wife died in 1818).

In terms of entertainment George Washington enjoyed raffles and lotteries, card playing, fox hunting, duck hunting, fishing, cockfighting, horse racing, boat racing, and dancing.

Although it is common knowledge that George Washington called for the emancipation of his slaves in his last will and testament, he stipulated that it would only take place upon the death of his wife, Martha. However, in Martha's will she did not free the slaves.

The original intent was for George Washington to be buried beneath the Rotunda floor under the dome of the Capitol. He died before the Rotunda was finished, and in 1828 the crypt was covered up.

President George Washington would bow to guests at presidential receptions to avoid physical contact and the tradition lasted through the presidency of John Adams. Washington would rest one hand on a sword and the other holding a hat to avoid the remote possibility of anyone forcing a handshake! Thomas Jefferson ended the tradition of “bowing” by shaking hands when greeting people.

Thomas Jefferson at eighty-three years of age felt that he would not live through the summer of 1826, but he hoped to live through July 4th (the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence). Both he and John Adams died on July 4, 1826 after long and distinguished careers. They had earlier been friends, then political enemies, and by the end of their lives had maintained a steady correspondence. Adams' last words were “Thomas Jefferson still survives” not knowing that Jefferson had expired earlier that day in Virginia. Jefferson's last words were: “Is it the Fourth? I resign my spirit to God, my daughter, and my country.”



The Founding Fathers: Fascinating Facts *(Continued)*

When George Washington died on December 12, 1797, his last words were: "I die hard, but I am not afraid to go ... Let me go quietly. I cannot last long ... It is well."

Alexander Hamilton was killed by Aaron Burr in a duel in Weehawken, New Jersey on July 1804. Hamilton's son, Philip, had died in a duel three years earlier (1801) at the same location.

Benjamin Franklin died on April 17, 1790. His daughter asked him to change positions on his bed to improve his breathing and his last words were: "A dying man can do nothing easy."

James Madison of Virginia was responsible for proposing the resolution to create the various Cabinet positions within the Executive Branch of our government and twelve amendments to the Constitution of which ten became the Bill of Rights.

James Madison proposed that congressional pay would be determined by the average price of wheat during the previous six years of a congressional session.

President James Monroe also died on July 4, 1831 – five years after Thomas Jefferson and John Adams.



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