

Washington's Presidency

One American's Story

Charles Thomson had served as secretary of the Continental Congress in 1774. Now, on April 14, 1789, he came to Mount Vernon in Virginia with a letter for George Washington. Washington knew the reason for the visit. Thomson's letter was to tell him that he had been elected the nation's first president. Before giving Washington the letter, Thomson made a short speech.

PRIMARY SOURCE

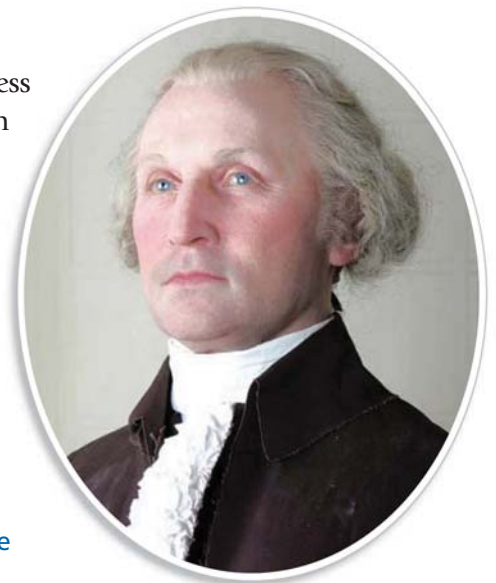
“I have now Sir to inform you that . . . your patriotism and your readiness to sacrifice . . . private enjoyments to preserve the happiness of your Country [convinced the Congress that you would accept] this great and important Office to which you are called not only by the unanimous votes of the Electors but by the voice of America.”

—Charles Thomson, quoted in *George Washington's Papers, at the Library of Congress 1741–1799*

Washington accepted the honor and the burden of his new office. He would soon guide the nation through its early years.

Washington's New Government

KEY QUESTION How did Washington's presidency shape new political traditions? Under the new Constitution, the first presidential election was held in 1789. Washington won, and traveled to New York City, the nation's capital, to be **inaugurated**, or formally sworn in, as president. On April 30, 1789 at Federal Hall, the inauguration took place. The runner-up, John Adams of Massachusetts, became Washington's vice-president. As the nation's first president, Washington knew that his every action would set a **precedent**—an example that becomes standard practice. Under the first president, many political institutions and traditions were established.



George Washington—shown in a wax likeness—was a popular choice for first president of the new nation.