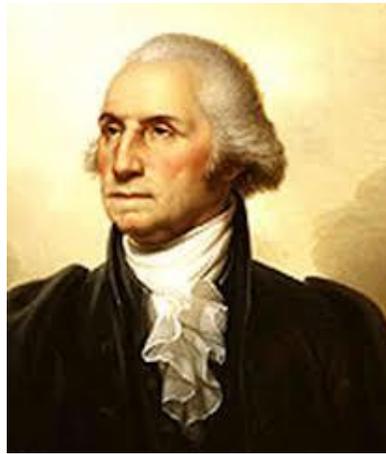


George Washington was more than just a popular war hero. People naturally looked to him as a national leader. He had taken part in the Continental Congresses and in creating the Constitution. He helped establish and strengthen the new national government.

The First President

Americans believed in **George Washington**. They saw him as an honest leader and a hero of the Revolution. Many believed he should be the first U.S. President.



- Washington had been looking forward to retirement and a quiet life on his Virginia farm. When he hesitated at becoming a candidate for the presidency, his friends convinced him to run.
- Fellow politician Gouverneur Morris told him “Should the idea prevail that you would not accept the presidency, it should prove fatal . . . to the new government.” Morris concluded confidently, “Of all men, you are the best fitted to fill that office.”
- In January 1789 each of the 11 states that had passed the Constitution sent electors to choose the first president. These delegates formed a group called the **electoral college** – a body of electors who present the people’s vote in choosing the president.
- The electoral college selected Washington unanimously, and John Adams became his vice president.

Organizing the Government

Hard work also lay ahead for members of the new government. The new federal government had to create policies and procedures that would determine the future of the country.

- The First Congress created departments in the executive branch for different areas of national policy. Washington met with the department heads, or cabinet members, who advised him.
- For two of his most important cabinet positions, Washington chose carefully. He selected Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury and Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State. Hamilton was a gifted economic planner, and Jefferson had served as ambassador to France.
- Henry Knox served as Secretary of War, and Samuel Osgood was selected as Postmaster General. Knox had helped Washington run the Continental Army, and Osgood had government experience.
- To set up the federal court system and the courts' location, Congress passed the **Judiciary Act of 1789**. This act created three levels of federal courts and defined their powers and relationship to state courts.
 - It set up federal district courts and circuit courts of appeals.
 - The president nominated candidates for federal judgeships. Those candidates had to be approved or rejected by the U.S. Senate.

Americans' Expectations for the Nation

Most Americans had high expectations for the new country. They wanted improved trade, free from too many restrictions. But they also expected the government to protect them and to keep the economy stable. However, the idea of belonging to one united nation was new to them.

- By 1790 the United States was home to almost 4 million people.
- Most Americans lived in the countryside and worked on farms. Farmers wanted fair tax laws and the right to settle western lands. They did not want the government to interfere with their daily lives.

- **Other Americans worked in towns as craftspeople, laborers, or merchants. These people look to the government to help their businesses. Most merchants wanted simpler trade laws established. Manufacturers wanted laws to protect them from foreign competitors.**
- **Most cities were small. Only New York City and Philadelphia had populations larger than 25,000.**
- **New York City was the first capital of the United States, and it represented the spirit of the new nation. Although badly damaged during the Revolution, the city had already begun to recover.**
 - **New York City had a bustling economy. International trade and business became more active.**
 - **In 1792 some 24 stockbrokers signed an agreement under a buttonwood tree on Wall Street. This agreement was the foundation for what later became the New York Stock Exchange.**
 - **In 1790 the city's population had topped 33,000 and was growing rapidly. To many officials, this vibrant city reflected the potential future of the new nation.**