

## This Day in History... April 30, 1789

# America's First Presidential Inauguration

On April 30, 1789, George Washington was inaugurated as America's first president. It was a day filled with celebration and established many traditions still in use today.

According to the Congress of the Confederation, the new government under the US Constitution was supposed to begin operations on March 4, 1789. However, several logistical issues prevented that from happening. A few members of the Senate and House met on that date, but not enough to make quorum, the required number to officially begin work.

A month earlier, 69 state electors unanimously voted to elect Washington the first president of the United States on February 4. The House and Senate were able to officially convene in early April. They counted the electoral votes and certified that Washington was elected president and John Adams vice president.

Washington officially received word of his unanimous election at 5 p.m. on April 14. While Washington was initially reluctant to take the position, he agreed to out of a sense of duty and departed for New York two days later.

Washington borrowed \$600 to travel from his home in Mount Vernon, Virginia, to New York City for his inauguration (New York City was the nation's capital at the time). Washington's journey from Mount Vernon was much like a parade honoring a national hero. Every city and town along the way held a celebration.

Inauguration day began with a military salute at Fort George at sunrise. Then beginning at 9 a.m., church bells throughout New York City rang for half an hour. At 12:30, Washington left Franklin House for Federal Hall. A military escort of 500 men, a horse troop, artillery, grenadiers, light infantry, and Scottish Highlanders accompanied him. The 57-year-old president-elect rode in a cream-colored coach to Federal Hall at Broad and Wall Streets.

After arriving at Federal Hall, Washington went to the Senate chamber and met with the two houses of Congress. Then at 2 p.m., Washington was brought out onto the balcony outside of the Senate chamber for his inauguration, so "that the greatest number of the people of the United States, and without distinction, may be witnesses to the solemnity."

There was no Supreme Court or chief justice at the time, so New York's highest-ranking judge, Chancellor Robert Livingstone, gave the Oath of Office. Though taking the oath by swearing on a Bible is not required by the constitution, Washington borrowed one from a nearby Masonic Lodge.

Washington took his oath of office with his hand on a Bible, a tradition that has been followed by all but three US presidents. [John Quincy Adams swore on a book of law as a stand in for the constitution, Theodore Roosevelt didn't use anything, and Lyndon B. Johnson swore on a Catholic missal (prayer book).] After he finished his oath, he kissed the Bible and a 13-gun salute followed. Livingston then announced to the crowd, "Long live George Washington, president of the United States!"

President Washington then delivered his inaugural address in the Senate Chamber, another tradition that he began. After the ceremony, the president's carriage couldn't be found in the sea of spectators jamming Wall Street. Washington suggested that the vice president and members of Congress walk with him as he traveled seven blocks to a previously arranged church service. Fireworks, paid for by private citizens, concluded the inaugural celebration that evening.



*Issued on the 150th anniversary of George Washington's inauguration.*



*This stamp was issued for the 200th anniversary of the Executive Branch as well as Washington's inauguration.*



*Stamp pictures Federal Hall, which was demolished in 1812.*

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