

SERIES ON GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

**WORLD  
FAMOUS  
PERSONALITIES  
IN HISTORY**

**P.N. FASMA And SMSI**

# Series On General Knowledge



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GEORGE WASHINGTON IN HISTORY

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## GEORGE WASHINGTON IN HISTORY

GEORGE WASHINGTON was commander in chief of the Continental army during the American Revolution and first president of the United States (1789-97). On April 30, 1789, George Washington, standing on the balcony of Federal Hall on Wall Street in New York, took his oath of office as the first President of the United States. 'As the first of every thing, in our situation will serve to establish a Precedent,' he wrote James Madison, 'it is devoutly wished on my part, that these precedents may be fixed on true principles.'

Born in 1732 into a Virginia planter family, he learned the morals, manners, and body of knowledge requisite for an 18th century Virginia gentleman. He pursued two intertwined interests: military arts and western expansion. At 16, he helped survey Shenandoah lands for Thomas, Lord Fairfax. Commissioned as a lieutenant colonel in 1754, he fought the first skirmishes of what grew into the French and Indian War. The next year, as an aide to Gen. Edward Braddock, he escaped injury although four bullets ripped his coat and two horses were shot from under him.

From 1759 to the outbreak of the American Revolution, Washington managed his lands around Mount Vernon and served in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Married to a widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, he devoted himself to a busy but happy life. But like his fellow planters, Washington felt himself exploited by British merchants and hampered by British regulations. As the quarrel with the mother country grew acute, he moderately but firmly voiced his resistance to the restrictions.

When the Second Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia in May 1775, Washington, one of the Virginia delegates, was elected Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. On July 3, 1775, at Cambridge, Massachusetts, he took command of his ill-trained troops and embarked upon a war that was to last six grueling years.

He realized early that the best strategy was to harass the British. He reported to Congress, 'we should on all Occasions avoid a general Action, or put anything to the Risque, unless compelled by a necessity, into which we ought never to be drawn.' Ensuing battles saw him fall back slowly, then strike unexpectedly. Finally in 1781 with the aid of French allies -he forced the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown.

Washington longed to retire to his fields at Mount Vernon. But he soon realized that the Nation under its Articles of Confederation was not functioning well, so he became a prime mover in the steps leading to the Constitutional Convention at