

The Journey

When the Senate finally achieved a quorum on April 6, the count revealed that George Washington was unanimously elected President. John Adams of Massachusetts became the first Vice President. Senator John Langdon, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, dispatched Secretary of Congress Charles Thomson to inform Washington of his election.



On April 16, Washington left Mount Vernon by coach, accompanied by his former aide-de-camp, Colonel David Humphreys, and Charles Thomson, bound for New York City. They traveled through Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, and arrived in New York City on April 23.

For eight days Washington's journey became a triumphal procession honoring the hero of a new Nation, the "father" of his country. Along the way, dignitaries and citizens of all walks of life honored Washington in a variety of events and celebrations. He visited with many friends from his days as Commander-in-Chief of the Army as well as those who took part in the Constitutional Convention. His journey reflects the profound universal respect and admiration of his countrymen, and its completion marked the transition from a loose collection of states to an independent nation governed by the People.

The inside map traces the journey to the Presidency as We the People commemorate the 200th anniversary of the inaugural of our first President, April 30, 1789.

PHOTO CREDITS

Front: Unknown artist's impression of the first Inaugural, courtesy of the New York Historical Society.

George Washington, oil on canvas by John Trumbull (1791), from the collection of City Hall, Charleston, South Carolina.

Washington's arrival at the Battery, New York, April 23, 1789. Reproduced from an early engraving by James Tyloler (1857) after an original by John C. McRae. Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association

Map, courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association.



Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution. Report which shall be transmitted to the President and the Senate, Washington, DC-20006

We the People GEORGE WASHINGTON, S.I.

Journey to the Presidency

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The journey of George Washington in April 1789 from his Mount Vernon plantation to New York City—and to the Presidency—highlighted the beginning of our national government under the Constitution. Washington's triumphal progress to his April 30 inaugural was witnessed by hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens. It symbolized their hopes for the new government which had begun with the first convening of Congress on March 4, 1789. This year's reenactment of that journey commemorates the 200th anniversary of our government, as it reminds us of the blessings we continue to enjoy under the Constitution.



Background

In 1776, as the 13 colonies struggled for independence, the tall Virginia gentleman accepted appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Under his leadership, this patchwork force of fighting men of varied background accomplished what most of Europe thought impossible: the defeat of the most powerful empire of that time—and independence for the new United States.

Once the war was over, Washington returned to his Mount Vernon plantation on the banks of the Potomac River in anticipation of a quiet, private life. He had no desire to become a leader in the government of the Virginia Commonwealth nor did he seek a position in the Confederation Congress of the new United States, meeting in New York City.

Nevertheless, Washington saw clearly his duty to the country he helped create. When requested in 1787 to attend the Philadelphia

Convention, Washington responded. Originally called by the Confederation Congress “for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation,” this meeting of state representatives produced a new Constitution.

Washington's arrival in May inspired a hero's welcome with thousands of admirers filling the streets. Selected to serve as President of the Convention, Washington chose not to take a direct part in the discussions and debate, but indirectly influenced the other delegates (or deputies). His was the honor of being the first to sign the completed document on September 17, 1787. After forwarding the new Constitution to the Confederation Congress, Washington returned to the serenity of his beloved Mount Vernon. But his seclusion was to be short lived.

Over the next ten months Washington carefully followed the ratification process while avoiding any direct involvement in the actual debate. The Constitution went into effect on June 21, 1788, when New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify it. On September 13, in one of its last acts, the Confederation Congress authorized the states to proceed with the selection of Presidential electors (as provided in Article II, Section 1), for the purpose of electing the first President of the United States under the Constitution.

By February 4, 1789, ten states had chosen electors. They met in their states and after voting sent their sealed ballots to New York City, the site of the first U.S. Congress. The ballots were to be counted officially when that body convened for the first time—which it was scheduled to do March 4, 1789.

GEORGE WASHINGTON: Journey to the Presidency

APRIL 16 Washington departs Mount Vernon and arrives in Alexandria about noon for an early dinner at Wise's Tavern. After an address by the Mayor and 13 toasts, he is escorted up the Potomac and ferried across to Georgetown. He spends the night at Spurrier's Tavern, about 12 miles southwest of Baltimore.

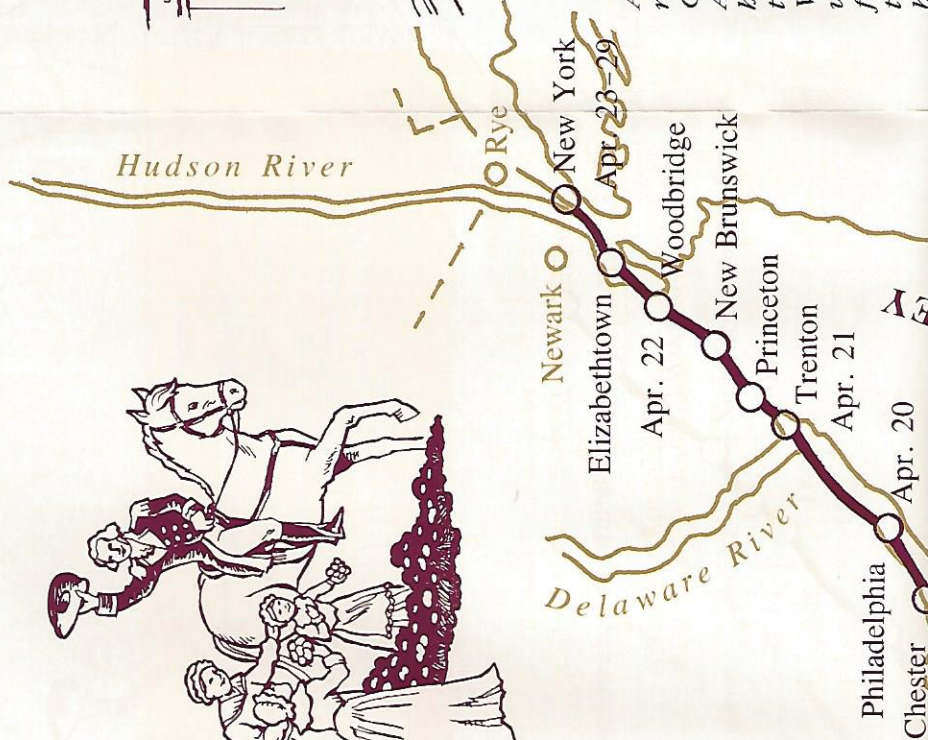
APRIL 17 Near Baltimore, Washington meets a large party of "citizens on horseback" and with an artillery salute continues to Daniel Grant's Fountain Inn. After dinner and addresses from Baltimore citizens and some of his former officers, he retires.

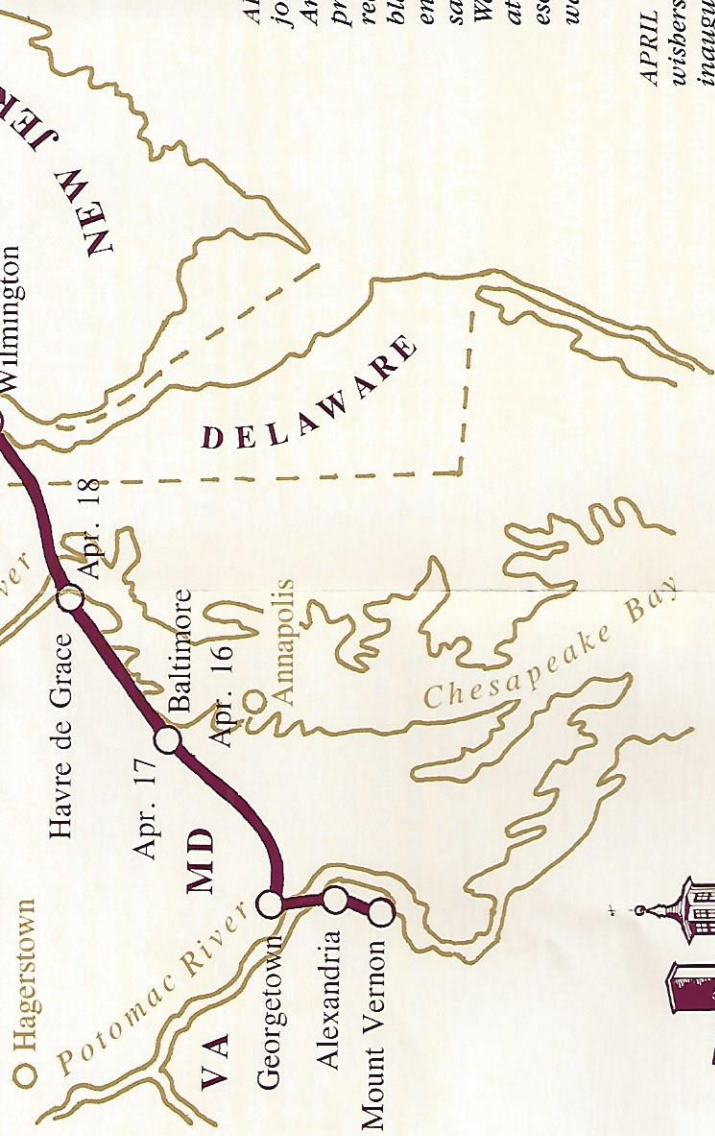
APRIL 18 Washington departs Baltimore about 5:30 a.m., accompanied by a band of citizens and saluted by artillery. After seven miles, he thanks his escorts and requests that they return home. He spends the night near Havre de Grace.

APRIL 19 On Sunday, Washington travels to Wilmington and arrives in the evening. A decorated vessel commemorates his crossing of the Delaware River.

APRIL 20 Washington leaves Wilmington after several addresses and is met at the Pennsylvania line by Philadelphians who escort him to Chester where he breakfasts. He mounts a white horse for his ride into Philadelphia. About noon, the procession crosses the Schuylkill River on Gray's Ferry Bridge, which has been decorated with laurel, evergreens, state flags, banners, and, at each end, a classical arch. A child lowers a crown of laurel as Washington passes beneath. Thousands line the road to Philadelphia, where he later dines with a party of 250 at City Tavern and enjoys a fireworks display.

APRIL 21 Washington departs in the rain for Trenton. Crossing the Delaware at Colvin's Ferry, he again mounts a white horse. An arch of greenery 12 feet long and 20 feet high, supported by 13 columns, spans the entrance of the bridge over Assunpink Creek. While crossing, Washington is welcomed by women and girls who sing an ode and strew flowers in his path. After a dinner and reception at Samuel Henry's City Tavern, he (probably) spends the night in Trenton.





APRIL 22 Washington breakfasts at Princeton with the president and faculty of Princeton College and the citizens of the town. At New Brunswick he is met with an artillery salute, the ringing of church bells and a welcoming band procession. Troops line the main street for Washington's review. After dinner he lodges for the night at Woodbridge.

APRIL 23 Washington proceeds to Elizabeth Town where a joint committee from Congress waits to escort him to New York. Around noon at Elizabeth Town Point, they board a specially prepared ceremonial barge with a keel of 47 feet, festooned with red curtains and manned by 13 pilots dressed in white smocks and black-fringed caps. Six barges carry other dignitaries. As the flotilla enters New York Harbor it is joined by other vessels. Amid gun salutes and the cheers of thousands of New Yorkers along the shore, Washington arrives at Murray's Wharf at the foot of Wall Street at about 3:00 p.m. After a welcome by Governor Clinton, a military escort cuts a passage through the dense throng for Washington, who walks to the Franklin House where he will reside.

APRIL 24-29 Washington receives numerous visits from well-wishers at Franklin House, while Congress makes arrangements for his inauguration.

APRIL 30 Day breaks to the sound of artillery and church bells. In honor of American industry, Washington dresses in a suit of brown broadcloth spun at Hartford with buttons displaying a wing-spread eagle. At 12:30 p.m., a military escort joined by a procession of dignitaries and citizens accompany Washington's coach to Federal Hall. Upon arrival, Washington proceeds to the Senate Chamber where the two Houses of Congress wait to greet him, then onto the outer balcony in front of the Senate Chamber. Chancellor Robert Livingston administers the oath to Washington, who holds his right hand on the Bible and responds "I swear, so help me God." Livingston then turns to the cheering crowd and proclaims "Long live George Washington, President of the United States."

For information on commemorative ceremonies along Washington's Route to New York City, contact:

<p>Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution 808 Seventeenth Street, NW Washington, DC 20006 (202) 653-9808</p>	<p>Virginia Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution 2015 Ivy Road Charlottesville, VA 22903-1780 (804) 924-0948</p>	<p>Maryland Office for the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution c/o Maryland State Archives Hall of Records, Box 828 Annapolis, MD 21404 (301) 974-3914</p>	<p>Independence National Historical Park Third and Chestnut Sts. Philadelphia, PA 19106 (215) 597-8974</p>	<p>New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution Cultural Education Center, Room 9D30 Empire State Plaza Albany, NY 12230 (518) 473-6191</p>
<p>Mount Vernon Ladies Association Mount Vernon, VA 22121</p>	<p>District of Columbia Bicentennial Commission 515 D Street, NW Room 307 Washington, DC 20001 (202) 727-2052</p>	<p>Delaware Heritage Commission Carvel State Office Bldg., 4th Floor 820 N. French Street Wilmington, DE 19801 (302) 652-6662</p>	<p>Constitution Bicentennial Commission of New Jersey Ramapo College, Room G-431 505 Ramapo Valley Road Mahwah, NJ 07430-1680 (201) 529-7401</p>	<p>New York City Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution 51 Chambers Street, Room 525 New York, NY 10007 (212) 566-1989</p>