

## Important Dates in 1789

**February 4:** Presidential electors cast ballots for President and Vice President.

**March 4:** The first Congress convenes, but without a quorum.

**April 1:** The House of Representatives achieves a quorum; elects Frederick Muhlenberg first Speaker of the House.

**April 6:** The Senate achieves a quorum; chooses John Langdon as the first President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

**April 30:** General Washington is inaugurated as President.

**July 27:** Department of Foreign Affairs established.

**August 7:** Department of War established.

**September 2:** Department of Treasury established.

**September 22:** Office of Postmaster General established.

**September 24:** Federal Court System created.

**September 25:** Bill of Rights submitted to the states for ratification.

### PHOTO CREDITS

*Front: Photo of Houdon bust of Washington, courtesy of Library of Congress.*

*Center: Federal Hall, after an engraving by Amos Doolittle, courtesy of Library of Congress.*

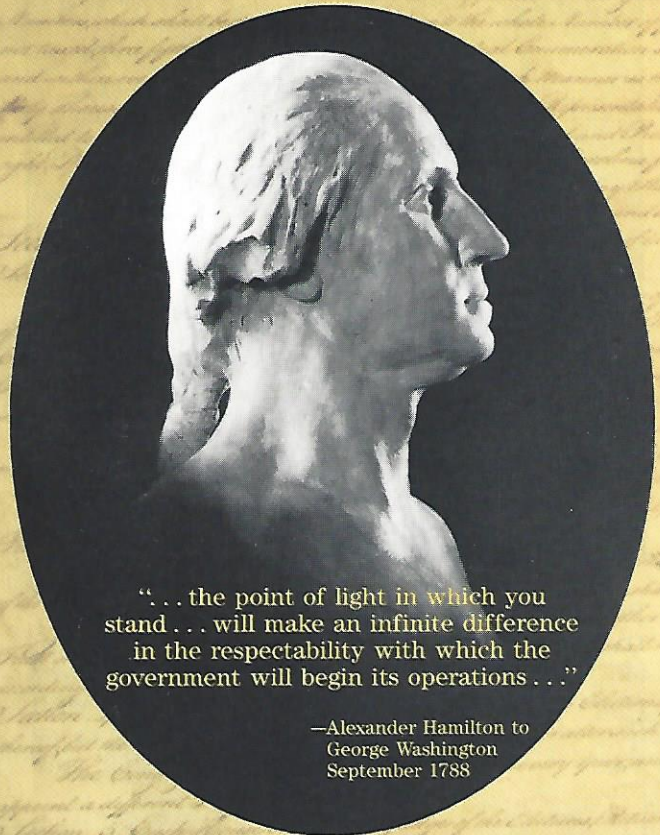
*Portrait of John Langdon by David Bohl, courtesy of Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.*

*Portrait of Frederick Muhlenberg, courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.*

*Photo of 1793 painting by J. Califano: Washington at Grey's Ferry, Trenton, N.J. on inaugural journey, from the collection of D. Seadler.*

# We the People The Grand Experiment Begins

Government under the Constitution  
Congress and the Presidency  
1789-1989



"... the point of light in which you stand . . . will make an infinite difference in the respectability with which the government will begin its operations . . ."

—Alexander Hamilton to  
George Washington  
September 1788



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## Two Hundred Years Ago

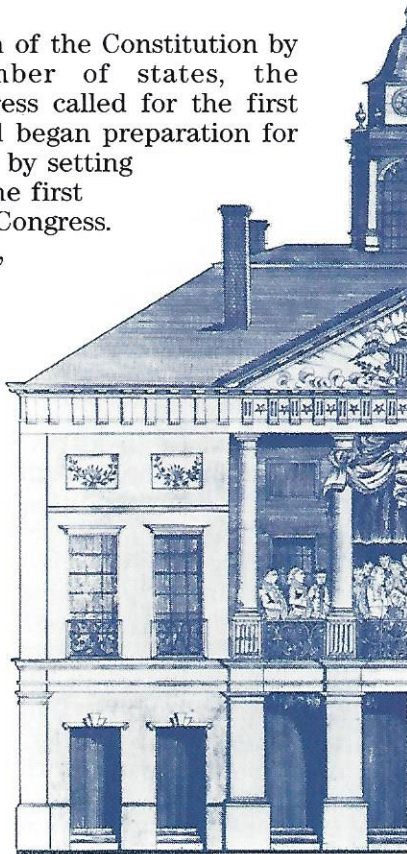
After the ratification of the Constitution by the required number of states, the Confederation Congress called for the first federal elections and began preparation for the new government by setting March 4, 1789, for the first meeting of the new Congress.

When that day came, however, only eight Senators and 13 Representatives met in New York City's newly refurbished Federal Hall. The House achieved a quorum on April 1 and elected Frederick A. Muhlenberg Speaker.

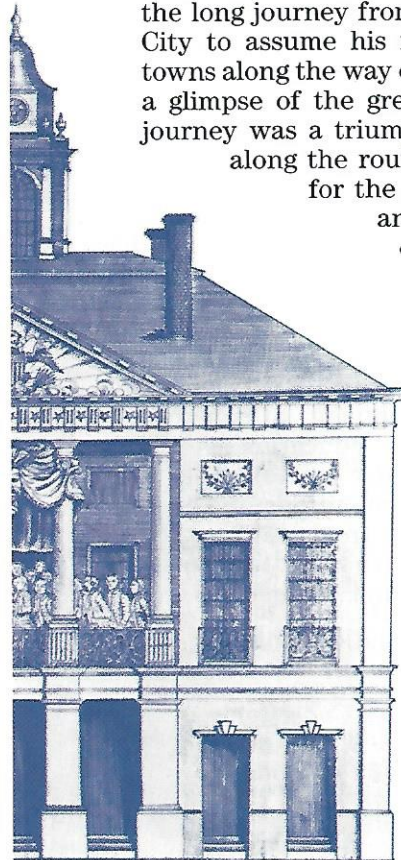
On April 6, the Senate achieved a quorum and faced its first task of counting the electoral votes, appointing New Hampshire Senator John

Langdon as temporary presiding officer for the "sole Purpose of receiving, opening, and counting" the ballots, as ordered by the ratification and implementation resolution of the Constitution Convention. George Washington was unanimously elected President, and John Adams became Vice President.

The next day the Senate dispatched Secretary Charles Thomson to Mount Vernon to inform General Washington officially of his election.



*Federal Hall in New York City  
1789*



*Site of the First Sessions of Congress  
and of the First Inaugural*

On April 16, the President-elect set out on the long journey from his home to New York City to assume his new post. In cities and towns along the way crowds gathered to catch a glimpse of the great man. The week-long journey was a triumphal procession: people along the route expressed admiration for the Revolutionary War hero and hopes for the success of the new government.

Washington arrived in New York City on April 23 amid much fanfare.

At the first presidential inaugural ceremony on April 30, Robert Livingston, chancellor of New York state administered the oath to Washington on the balcony of Federal Hall.

Two of the three branches of the new government thus began operations.

But organizing the new government entailed more than simply installing elected officials. During the next five months Congress created four key executive departments and the office of postmaster general. Early legislation also established the basic federal judicial system, providing for Supreme Court justices as well as three ad hoc circuit courts and 13 district courts. Perhaps the most important accomplishment of the First Congress, however, was the passage of the Bill of Rights and its submission to the states for ratification.