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WASHINGTON

1st, 1789–97

Very tall for his generation with reddish hair and gray-blue eyes, George Washington had shoulders too narrow for his height but hands and feet that were tremendous. His face was massive, scarred, and pockmarked.

Gilbert Stuart painted Washington in 1796. Stuart said Washington's features were indicative of the strongest and most ungovernable passions, the sockets of the eyes, for instance, were larger than what I ever met with before, and the upper part of the nose broader. In other words, he had a terrible temper but held it under wonderful control.

With something like a smile, Washington replied, He's right. He said, I am so hackneyed to the touches of the painter's pencil, that I am now altogether at their beck; and sit, like Patience on a monument, whilst they are delineating the lines of my face. At first I was as impatient at the request, and as restive under the operation, as a colt is of the saddle. Now, no dray-horse moves more readily to his thill than I to the painter's chair.

We can safely assume Washington got some schooling between the ages of seven and eleven, and that he did not go on. His 900-volume library was filled with all the get-rich-quick handbooks of the day.

Although Washington was physically strong, he was not the indomitable human force that popular history paints. He was often sick, particularly with infections. Many of them were life threatening, including diphtheria, malaria, smallpox, tuberculosis, and dysentery.

Martha never became pregnant during her forty-year marriage to The Potomac Stallion. Given her previous fertility, it could well be concluded that the difficulty was in her husband. However, Washington, the magnificent athlete, who possessed in abundance every other physical prowess, could not altogether admit to himself that he was sterile.

The bleedings inflicted by Washington's doctors hastened his end. About 35 percent of the blood in his body was drained in twelve hours. His final words were,

Doctor, I die hard; but I am not afraid to go. I am just going. After his death, Washington's frozen corpse measured 6 feet 3 1/2 inches. Doctors hoped Washington was in a suspended state from which he could be aroused: the body would be thawed gradually, first in cool water and then with warm blankets and rubbing of the skin, and finally, a transfusion of lamb's blood.

d. December 14, 1799 (Mount Vernon, Virginia), at 67, from a rare tracheal infection.



JOHN ADAMS

2nd, 1797–1801

John Adams was not a happy president. He has been labeled manic-depressive, slightly paranoid, and a man consumed by an irrepressible urge to master the world.

Adams started smoking and chewing tobacco at age eight and continued throughout his life.

Once, when asked to provide a physical description of himself, he wrote back: I have one head, four limbs, and five senses, like any other man, and nothing peculiar in any of them. Standing 5 feet 7 inches, Adams was always stocky but grew notoriously plump and was called His Rotundity behind his back.

In Adams's time, political candidates were listed together on a ballot that did not differentiate between the offices. Each elector voted twice, and the highest and next-highest vote getters became president and vice president. Adams liked the system, claiming it would remind great men aspiring to political office the virtues of humility, patience, and moderation, without which every man in power becomes a ravenous beast of prey.

Throughout his life, he was haughty, condescending, self-righteous, and cantankerous; he was so aloof that even the people with whom he joined forces were not always sure he was on their side. To his wife, Abigail, he would address letters My Diana, after the Roman goddess of the moon. He was her Lysander, Spartan hero, giant of great heart.

Adams knew his health deteriorated under stressful circumstances. His diary records: Great Anxiety and distress, and Pain in my Breast and a complaint in my Lungs. His life, he wrote, is a continual Scaene of Fatigue, Vexation, Labour, and Anxiety. Sensitive to heat, he sweated profusely even on cool evenings. He also confessed to Mental Confusion, Fidgets, Pidlings, and Irritabilities.

He said, Ballast is what I want. I totter with every breeze.

The presidency wore out Adams. His eyes weakened so that he could barely read or write, he lost his hair and teeth and he lisped because he refused to wear false ones. He also developed a hand tremor he referred to as Quivering.

One of two presidents to sign the Declaration of Independence, Adams died on its fiftieth anniversary. His friend and political rival, Jefferson, had died some hours earlier that same day. Although it is said that Adams's last words were *Thomas Jefferson survives*, in fact, the last word was indistinct and imperfectly uttered.

d. July 4, 1826 (Quincy, Massachusetts), at 90, of old age.