



1801-1809

Third President of the United States of America

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson changed the world, and he did it with a pen. He was the first secretary of state, the second vice president and the third president of the United States.

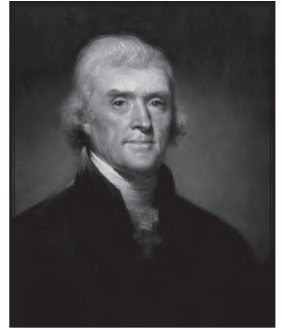
Born on April 13, 1743, in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, Thomas was born to Colonel Peter and Jane Jefferson. His mother was from a wealthy British family of high social standing. His father kept a close eye on Thomas's education and taught him to read and write at a very early age. The elder Jefferson had a library of more than 200 books, including the works of Shakespeare, and young Thomas had read all of them by the age of six.

Thomas's father excelled in mathematics, and Thomas learned it all quickly. He learned to survey land, draw maps and keep accounts. He became a proficient hunter, strong swimmer and an excellent rider. When Thomas was just nine years old, he was studying Greek, Latin and French.

At the age of 14, Thomas's father died very suddenly. Peter left the plantation to Thomas and his brother and left his books, writing desk and surveying tools to Thomas. This inheritance helped him become an expert mathematician who could design buildings, perform medical operations like an experienced surgeon and play the violin. Called "Long Thomas" by his friends, he was a six-foot-tall, very thin redheaded man with broad shoulders.

At the age of 17, Thomas enrolled in the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA. There he studied calculus, physics, natural science, agriculture, astronomy, chemistry, history and languages. He began writing on every thought and observation he had in notebooks. For the rest of his life, he chronicled the minute details of his surroundings, including the price of an egg and the planting of crops.

After finishing college in 1762, Jefferson decided to study law. In 1764, he turned 21 and assumed responsibility for his family, his slaves and the work on the plantation. Thomas began his law practice in 1767. Although he had never formally studied architecture, he



Portrait by Rembrandt Peale

Artist Concept:

Jefferson is depicted writing the Declaration of Independence. From up close, the entire document can be seen on this statue. Jefferson appears to be looking away from his work—as if looking to the future.

Sculptor: Ed Hlavka | Benefactors: Dr. Ed and Peg Seljeskog

Thomas Jefferson

designed and supervised the building of his Monticello home.

In December 1768, 25-year-old Thomas Jefferson entered politics when he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. While in Williamsburg, Thomas met Martha Wayles Skelton, a 20-year-old widow with a three-year-old son who died a few years later. On January 1, 1772, Thomas and Martha married and then had a daughter, Martha, in September of 1772. Mrs. Jefferson's father died shortly after she was married, and she inherited 11,000 acres of land, 135 slaves, 669 books and a large debt. The Jefferson's then had a second daughter, Jane, who died shortly after she was born.



Of Note: Jefferson's hand on the Declaration.

Although not able to attend the First Continental Congress, Jefferson did represent Virginia at the Second Continental Congress. There, Congress chose five men to write America's Declaration of Independence—Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston. Adams

said that Jefferson was the man to do the writing. Thomas retired to his room for 17 days and wrote and rewrote until he thought every word was perfect. In his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, he proposed the abolition of slavery but was later overruled due to the fear that the southern colonies would reject this and refuse to ratify this declaration.

Adams and Franklin thought the declaration was elegant and made very few changes. The document was then presented to the entire Congress on June 28, 1776, and was met with great debate. Finally, on the evening of July 4, 1776, the delegates walked to the desk and signed their names to the Declaration of Independence. In keeping with his obsessive note-taking, Jefferson recorded the temperatures at varying times of day on each day. The temperature of the room at the time of the signing was 73.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

The next few years were life changing for the Jeffersons. In May of 1777, Martha presented Thomas with his first-born son, but the baby died one month later. The following August, her fourth child, Polly, was born. In June 1779, Jefferson was elected governor of Virginia. In April of 1780, a fifth child was born. Unfortunately, shortly after the birth, this child also died. At the end of his term as governor, a weary Jefferson retired to his beloved Monticello.

The spring of 1782 found a happy, contented Jefferson. Martha gave birth to their sixth child, Lucy, born strong and healthy. However, after the birth, Martha became weaker and weaker, and she died on September 6, 1782, with her husband at her bedside. In his desperate need to regain control of his life, Jefferson went to work on his library. He listed every one of his 2640 books, made a list of each of his 240 slaves and constructed a list of every letter he had ever written.

Jefferson was then elected as the Virginia delegate to Congress. In May 1784, Jefferson was asked to go to France to work with Adams and Franklin on trade agreements. There, he received the dreadful news from Virginia that his two-year-old daughter, Lucy, had died.

Thomas Jefferson

While in France, Thomas heard his friend, James Madison, was helping write the Constitution. Jefferson wrote of his concerns that there was nothing being included about the rights of people. He wrote, "Human rights were at least as important as property rights."

George Washington was elected as the new country's first president, and Jefferson's name was proposed as the first secretary of state. Jefferson accepted the invitation and, in February 1790, took the post.

Soon the Democrat-Republicans convinced Jefferson to run against Adams for the presidency. The election was very close, but Adams received the most electoral votes and became the second president. The law at that time dictated that the man who came in second became vice president. On March 4, 1797, President John Adams and Vice-President Thomas Jefferson were sworn into office.

During his first term as president, Adams and Jefferson were often in disagreement, and Adams rarely spoke to Jefferson. Two years into his vice presidency, Jefferson returned to his home and stayed there most of the year. It was at that time that Jefferson decided to run against Adams for the next presidential election. When it was over, Jefferson was elected the third president of the United States and took the oath of office on March 4, 1801. He chose Madison to be secretary of state. It wasn't until years later that Jefferson and Adams renewed their friendship. Some believe that a heartfelt letter of condolence from Abigail Adams to Jefferson after the death of his wife led to a softening of resentments.

Jefferson realized the importance of incorporating the Mississippi River for the new nation's trade agreements. He bought the entire Louisiana Territory of almost a million square miles for \$15 million dollars (or three cents an acre) from French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. As a result, President Jefferson doubled the size of our country. In May 1804, Jefferson commissioned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore this new frontier. He could not see them off on their journey, as he had to return to Monticello to be with his married daughter, Polly, while she was in childbirth, but she died before he arrived. Of the six children born to Thomas and Martha, only one daughter, Martha, outlived him.

Jefferson ran for the presidency again in 1804 and won by a landslide. However, this term as president had its challenges. His decision to declare a trade embargo against England backfired, and his former vice president, Aaron Burr, staged a smear campaign against Jefferson. This led to Jefferson's desire to leave political life and return to Monticello. As he began his retirement, Jefferson found himself deeply in debt. He paid off his father-in-law's debts, which put Jefferson further in debt. By 1826, Jefferson owed over \$100,000.

In 1826, at the age of 83, Thomas Jefferson became very ill. On July 3, he knew he was dying but fought to live one more day. Jefferson then died on July 4, 1826, which was the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Just a few hours later, his friend, John Adams, died on the very same day.

Thomas Jefferson created a vision for a new country. Much of the foundation upon which our nation is built came from the mind and the pen of this one man.