

## **The Fourteen Forgotten Presidents**

**Go into any middle school or high school in America and ask the most basic question, who was the first president of Colonial America and the answer given will be George Washington which bears an incorrect answer.**

**Washington is certainly considered the “Father of Our Country” today and by the way not the first ‘Father of Our Country’ according to his own public words nor the first president of America by his own acknowledgement and actions when he bowed and formally addressed the Honorable Peyton Randolph as our first American President in 1774.**

**Washington was elected the first President of the United States under the Constitution when Robert R. Livingston, Chancellor of New York administered the oath of office to George Washington at Federal Hall in New York City on April 30th, 1789.**

**We tend to forget America established an early form of representative government eventually producing a republican form of government beginning in the year 1774 with the advent and assembly of elected members to the First Continental Congress. These men met under assembly for the very first time in Carpenter’s Hall in September of that same year in the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.**

**The question which begs to be answered here is who led America for a period of 15 years spanning the time between 1774 and 1789. Who were the men who assumed the highest pivotal level of elected leadership in America during and after the American Revolution? The answer begs another question. Who were the first elected American Presidents**

**who operated the congresses and led the nation in times of war and peace?**

**The answer to these basic questions is the “Fourteen Forgotten Presidents of America”. These are the great men and patriots who were elected to serve as the Presidents of the First and Second Continental Congresses and the Congress of the Articles of Confederation. These are the men who led our fledgling government and by their actions and leadership bestowed upon our citizenry a new and a free nation.**

**Today, these great men are lost in our American history. Their memory has long been eliminated from school curriculums and the role they played in forming our nation has been all but overlooked and forgotten.**

**Today, my intention is to briefly discuss with you these personalities and patriots who should not be forgotten but cherished by everyone who calls themselves, Americans!**

**(1)We begin with the Honorable Peyton Randolph our first American President born 1723/died 1775. He was the foremost legal mind in America and served as the King’s Attorney of Virginia.**

**He studied at the Inner Temple in London and served as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses. Randolph was an outstanding scholar and tutored many of the notable men of the South at William and Mary College.**

**He was by far the most popular and respected figure of his time. Elected to the First Continental Congress he was unanimously elected as the first President of our fledgling nation. He served as our president twice from September 5th**

to October 21st of 1774 and then again for a few days in 1775 from May 10<sup>th</sup> to May 23<sup>rd</sup>. He resigned his presidency of the Congress due to ill health and died that year from a cerebral brain hemorrhage never to see his beloved country free.

(2) Our second American President was Henry Middleton, one of the wealthiest planters of the South educated in England. His plantation, the Oaks” was inherited from his father and rivaled Mt. Vernon in prestige and size consisting of 50,000 acres of land and over 800 slaves in South Carolina.

Henry was Speaker of the House of Commons of SC and King’s Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1770-1775. His valor as an Indian fighter during the Cherokee War earned him wide recognition throughout the colonies. Elected as a SC delegate to the First Congress, he was selected by his fellow delegates to serve as president to fill in for the ailing Randolph.

Henry served as president from October 1774 to May of 1775. Middleton was a member of the Congressional Council of Safety and helped establish the young nation’s policy and support of education. Resigning his congressional position in February 1776 he was replaced as a delegate by his son Arthur who signed the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation.

(3) Our third United States President was John Hancock serving two widely spaced terms from May 1775 to October 1777 and from November 1785 to June 1786. Hancock was a principal player in the Battle at Lexington but most known as the presiding president of the Second Continental Congress officially signing the Declaration of Independence.

**Hancock was well known for his reputation as being one of the wealthy merchants of Boston, MA and for his public defiance against unfair trading practices and taxes by the British. He was a risk taker in all respects and believed in independence. In 1778 he was commissioned a Major General in the unsuccessful Rhode Island Campaign. He was Washington's rival for the military position of Commander of the American Forces and was not chosen for the role. He lacked the brilliance of John Adams and the inspiration of Samuel Adams for the cause but will be well noted as one of the historically important founding fathers.**

**(4) Henry Laurens of South Carolina served as our fourth President of the United States succeeding John Hancock and remains the only American President ever to be held as a prisoner of war by a foreign power. George Washington publically declared after he was released from the Tower of London that President Laurens was truly the "Father of Our Country"! He was President from November 1777 through December 1778. After stepping down as president he was commissioned in 1780 to travel to Holland in seeking a treaty and loan for the United States from the United Netherlands but was captured by a British warship on the voyage and taken to London. He was placed as a prisoner in the tower of London to be beheaded for high treason to the crown. His imprisonment was so severe it became an embarrassment for parliament both in England and America. He served 14 brutal months in the tower which later shortened his life and was released in a prisoner of war exchange for Lord Cornwallis after the Battle of Yorktown. Upon his release Henry Laurens continued to serve his country as part of the 3-man team which negotiated the terms of the Treaty of Paris held at the Paris Peace Conference.**

**(5)Our fifth United States president was John Jay, one of the most talented men of his time who was elected president from December of 1778 to September of 1779.**

**Additionally, he authored five of the Federalist Papers, was our first Secretary of State known as the Secretary of Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation, our first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and was a major player in aiding Franklin, Jefferson, Adams and Laurens in completing the Treaty of Paris of 1783.**

**He is most noted having missed the Signing of the Declaration of Independence but the man responsible for the Jay Treaty averting future hostilities with Britain and the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution.**

**(6)President Samuel Huntington succeeded John Jay as our sixth United States President being totally self-educated and one of the greatest legal minds of the country. He served as a congressional delegate for five consecutive terms and as our president from September 1779 until ill health forced his resignation in July of 1781.**

**Samuel eventually became Chief Justice of Connecticut's Supreme Court in 1783.**

**He was elected by the populist of his state to the office of Lieutenant Governor in 1785 and the following year Governor of Connecticut in 1786.**

**(7)Our seventh President had an astonishing fifty year career in public life and held almost every possible position-from Deputy Attorney to President of the United States. His name was Thomas McKean and he served as our president from July 1781 to November 1781. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and established the voting procedure for the Stamp Act Congress. He helped draft and sign the Articles of Confederation. In 1799 Thomas was elected Governor of Pennsylvania serving three consecutive**

terms as Governor and completing one of the longest political careers of public service among all our founding fathers.

**(8)Our eighth President was John Hanson who was the first president to serve a full term after the full ratification of the Articles of Confederation. In 1777 he was elected to Congress where he proved himself to be an outstanding and brilliant administrator. Hanson's plantation was located just across the Potomac River from Mt. Vernon and he was well known to Washington as a friend and neighbor.**

**He served as our president from November 1781 to November 1782. Hanson made many sacrifices for our nation losing two sons killed in action with the Continental Army during the American Revolution. He was strongly opposed to the Constitution and remained an anti-federalist until his untimely death in November 1783 at 62 years of age.**

**(9)Elias Boudinot succeeded John Hanson to serve as our ninth President of the United States from November 1782 until November 1783. He was elected to serve as a congressional delegate from state of New Jersey. He was best known and well respected for his career in foreign diplomacy and served as U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs before being elected as President of the United States. After his retirement Washington appointed him Director of the U.S. Mint in October 1795 which he held for many years until his death in 1821 at 81 years of age.**

**(10)Thomas Mifflin was our tenth United States President succeeding Boudinot in November 1783. He is best known for being General Washington's first aide-de camp and the United States President who accepted General Washington's resignation of his military commission. Mifflin served as our first Quarter Master General during the war and**

distinguished himself in military actions on Long Island and near Philadelphia. His military career was not without controversy and yet he continued to be elected to positions of responsibility as Governor of Pennsylvania and as President of the United States from November 1783 to November of 1784.

In spite of charges of corruption over the years during his military and political careers it seems his magnetic personality and his abilities as an effective speaker afforded him a life of public service continuous over a period spanning 30 years.

(11)Our eleventh President of the United States was the infamous Richard Henry Lee whose fame and bravery was well known among all military and political circles.

His congressional resolution stated “that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free and Independent States was approved by the Continental Congress on July 2, 1776.

He was originally appointed a member to the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence but was replaced on the committee by Thomas Jefferson after having to leave the congress to attend to his wife whom had fallen ill. He remained instrumental shaping the content of the document. He served as President of the United States from November 1784 to November 1785 when he was succeeded by the second administration of John Hancock.

He was instrumental in drafting the Northwest Ordinance which provided the formation of new states from the Northwest Territory. Lee opposed the Constitution but as a Virginia Senator offered corrections to the Bill of Rights thereby assuring passage of the amendments. He was also the great uncle of Robert E. Lee.

**(12)Our twelfth President of the United States was Nathaniel Gorham who was elected when John Hancock could not fulfill his second presidential term. Gorham served as President of the United States from June 1786 to February 1787. His traits of honesty and integrity won him acclaim as a national political figure. He attended the Constitutional Convention as a member delegate from Mass and was a signer of the U.S. Constitution. He died on June 11, 1796 at 58 years of age.**

**(13)Arthur St. Clair was our thirteenth President of the United States and our only president of the United States born and bred on foreign soil in Edinburgh, Scotland. His fame spread when he organized the New Jersey and the Philadelphia militias, led the Continental Army's Canadian Expedition and was elected as a congressional delegate from Pennsylvania.**

**He was elected president in 1787 and served in the position from February 1787 to January 1788. He became the first governor of the Northwest Territory and a founder of Cincinnati. He was an antifederalist and predicted intrusion of the expanded centralized power of a Federal Government usurping state's rights.**

**Arthur St. Clair died in poverty at 81 years of age.**

**(14)Our fourteenth President of the United States was Cyrus Griffin who like Peyton Randolph, our first president was trained in London's Inner Temple to be a lawyer. He was a protégé of George Washington having worked with him on several speculative land deals in the West.**

**It was during his presidency that ratification of the Constitution was formalized and finalized. He served as the nation's chief executive from January 1788 until George Washington's inauguration on April 30, 1789.**



**Finally, the “Father of Our Country” President George Washington, the fifteenth President of the United States and our first elected president to serve as national leader under the newly formed executive branch of government and the US Constitution.**

**I hope you have enjoyed the historical overview of our early Presidents of America and the United States of America who were great men of courage and patriotism affording great contributions towards our liberty and freedoms and over time have all but been forgotten!**

**It is my hope that professional historians will someday make a genuine effort to include the early presidents of our nation in our American History. We are making an attempt to introduce this educational program on the early presidents to school children across the State of Alabama in 2017.**

**Do you have any questions or comments regarding my presentation?**

**Thank You!**

