



The First American Republic 1774-1789: The First Fourteen American Presidents Before Washington

Thomas Patrick Chorlton

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George Washington's Inauguration in April 1789 marked the beginning of government under the new United States Constitution. What few Americans realize is that there had been a fully functioning national government prior to 1789. It was called the Continental Congress and it was, in every respect, the First American Republic (1774-1789).

It began on September 5, 1774, when elected delegates from eleven of the American colonies first assembled in Philadelphia. Surprisingly, that First American Republic is most often dismissed in textbooks and popular history as a failed attempt at self-government. And yet, it was during that fifteen year period that the United States won the war against the strongest empire on Earth, established organized government as far west as the Mississippi River, built alliances with some of the great powers of Europe and transformed thirteen separate entities into a national confederation.

When the Continental Congress initially met in 1774, its very first order of business was to elect one of its own members to serve as President. He functioned as Head of State, much as the Presidents of Germany and Italy do today. He signed all official documents, received all foreign visitors and represented the emerging nation at official events and through extensive correspondence. While Congress retained all other executive, legislative and judicial functions, the President even presided over its deliberations. Eventually, a house, carriage and servants were provided for the President as a sign of national pride and respect.

In all, fourteen distinguished individuals were chosen by their peers for this unique and awesome responsibility. They were the giants of their age, men of power, wealth and experience who often led their new nation through extremely difficult days largely on the strength of their character. For far too long they have been lost to history.

This is their story.

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