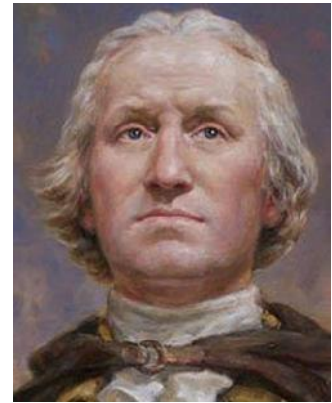


After two 'On This Day' emails in a row, we return to the main theme of this week's emails, which is REBELS. After looking at Robin Hood on Monday (hope your comprehension exercise went well), today we look at GEORGE WASHINGTON, who led the American army to victory over the British in the AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE (which I talked about on April 9 and September 17) and then became America's first President, serving two terms as President from 1789-1797. After leaving office as President, Washington only had two more years to live and died in 1799.



Washington was born in 1732, in the state of VIRGINIA. His family was very rich, having acquired a lot of land since Washington's great-grandfather (your great-grandfather is anyone who is father of one of your grandfathers or grandmothers - who are your great-grandfathers?) came over to America from England, back in 1656. You have to remember that at the time Washington was born, all the American states were British territories - they only became independent by going to war with the British in 1775, declaring their independence from the British on July 4 1776, and beating the British army that had come over to America to squash the American rebellion so badly that it surrendered in 1781. So Washington was as much British as he was American, and in fact he features in the OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY, which tells the life stories of notable figures from British history.

As it happens, Washington was so British that he fought in the British Army in various wars that the British fought in America when he was younger, against the French (who were always fighting with the British over control of various parts of America) and the Native Americans (who were in America long before any Europeans arrived - I told you about them on June 25). But Washington was annoyed that he didn't get promoted to a senior position in the main British Army, back in Britain, and was ready to listen when people living in the British-ruled American states started saying that they deserved to be independent and to form their own country. Fighting between Americans who felt that way and British soldiers who were stationed on the American continent started in 1775, but things got very, very serious on July 4 1776 when the American states officially declared independence from Britain, and KING GEORGE III responded by declaring that the leaders of the American rebellion against British rule were traitors (which meant they could be shot if they were captured) and ordered an Army to cross the Atlantic and bring the rebellion to an end.

Because of Washington's military experience, he was appointed commander in chief of the American Continental Army in 1775. But things initially did not go very well for him or the American rebels. Fighting between the Americans and British focussed around the northern states, and in particular NEW YORK (which was an important city, even then). The British captured New York in the winter of 1776, and took shelter from the freezing weather there. The Americans couldn't enjoy that luxury - they were on the run, and Washington was forced to cross the Delaware River into PHILADELPHIA and try to find shelter for his army from the freezing winter weather in that state. With winter over, the two armies fought a number of pretty



inconclusive battles, and once again winter came round with the Americans having no comfortable base to call their own. The winter of 1777 was the low point for the American army. Washington had 11,000 men under his command at that point, and they holed up in VALLEY FORGE in Philadelphia. But the freezing weather killed about 3,000 of Washington's men. It looked like the Americans were going to lose the war. But Washington kept his men believing that they could win, and trained them over and over again to get ready



to fight the British. And early in 1778, the French intervened in the American War of Independence on the side of the Americans, lending soldiers led by the brilliant general the MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE (pronounced 'Mark - ee duh La - fie - ett') to help the Americans. Suddenly the Americans started winning big victories against the British, culminating in victory at YORKTOWN in 1781, which brought about the surrender of the British Army and the end of the War of Independence.

Having won the war, Washington was eager to retire back to his family farm - MOUNT VERNON, in Virginia. But he waited for the British and Americans to sign an official peace treaty in 1783 before resigning as commander in chief of the American army. But he was lured out of retirement when the American states met together in 1787 at a CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, to decide on the terms of the AMERICAN CONSTITUTION (I told you about this on September 17). Washington attended as a member of the Virginia delegation to the convention, but was quickly appointed to preside over the convention because everyone regarded him as a hero, and would go along with whatever he decided. Once the terms of the American Constitution were agreed on, on September 17 1787, and all the states had agreed to those terms, elections had to be held to determine who the first President of the new United States of America would be.

Each state contributed a certain number of electors to cast votes for the new President - with the number of electors contributed by each state depending on how many people lived in that state. These electors were known as the ELECTORAL COLLEGE, and ever since the question of who is going to be President has been decided by the Electoral College, with each state's electors casting their vote for whichever candidate for President won the most votes in that state. But this time, the first time the Electoral College decided who would be President, each elector was free to choose who they wanted to be President - they were each given two

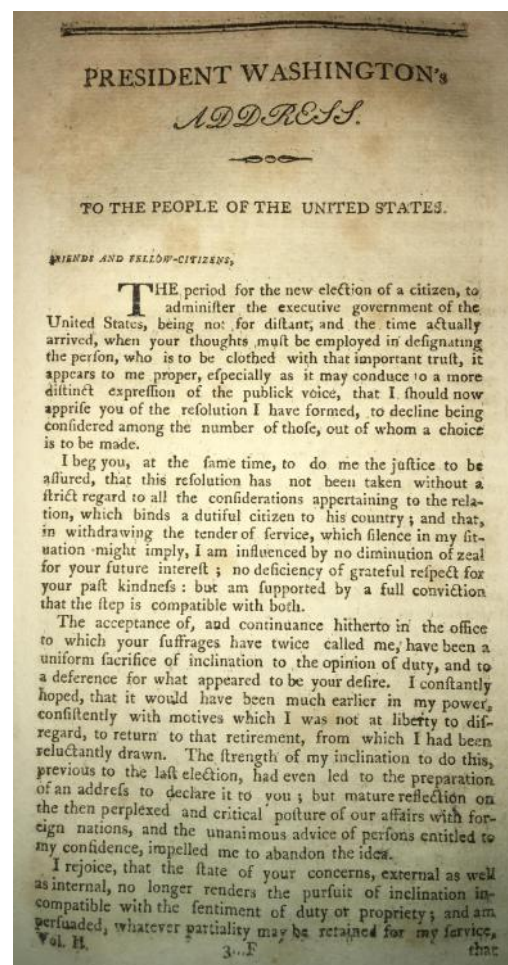


votes and told them to cast them for two different candidates. There were 69 electors in all, and Washington got 69 votes to be President - which meant every single elector had voted for Washington with one of their votes. The runner-up in the election was JOHN ADAMS, who got 34 votes. So Washington became President and John Adams became his Vice-President.

Washington served four years as President, helping the United States of America to take its first steps as a brand-new nation. Washington kept emphasising the need for Americans to stick together and not fight and squabble among themselves. He insisted that the President should be addressed simply as 'Mr President' rather than as 'Your Excellency' in order to make it clear that even the President was just an ordinary person, who had a lot in common with the people he was leading. But Washington was well aware that the politicians around him, many of them brilliant geniuses in their own right, such as his Vice President, and THOMAS JEFFERSON, and ALEXANDER HAMILTON, were itching to fight it out among themselves for who would control America once Washington was gone. So in order to keep the peace for as long as possible, after his first four years as President were up, Washington consented to allow his name to go forward as a candidate for election to become President at the second presidential election, in 1792.



The result was the same as in 1789 - Washington was elected President unanimously (with everyone voting for him) and John Adams was elected his Vice-President. But in 1796, Washington decided he had had enough and could not go on to a third term. Instead, he would retire back to his farm at Mount Vernon. When King George III heard the news that Washington was voluntarily stepping down as President, he could not believe it - the idea that someone could peacefully give up their power as supreme ruler over the country was unthinkable to King George III. But Washington set an important example by doing this - ever since, Presidents have been expected to give up their power as President peacefully, not make difficulties for whoever was going to come after them as President (which in Washington's case was John Adams, who after two terms as Vice President, finally got to be President in 1797). Washington also set an example that has lasted to this day, of the outgoing President giving a farewell address to the nation before giving up the powers of the Presidency. In his farewell address, Washington again emphasised the need for Americans to stick together - that if they were united, they could become the greatest nation on earth. He warned them against creating division through political parties, or thinking of themselves as



Northerners or Southerners, and against getting involved in foreign wars or foreign affairs. All of these warnings have remained relevant throughout the history of America - and it remains to be seen whether a failure to listen to Washington's warnings will ultimately result in the downfall of the United States.

So Washington retired back to his farm, with his place as one of America's greatest Presidents firmly assured - he is one of the four American presidents whose faces appear on the iconic MOUNT RUSHMORE (the other three are THOMAS JEFFERSON, ABRAHAM LINCOLN, and THEODORE ROOSEVELT). And two years later he died, having spent two long winters in the cold and wet outside in his farm, and then coming back in and going straight in for dinner without changing his clothes. And why didn't he want to change? Because he didn't want to keep his guests for dinner waiting. A great man, to the very end - and an example to us all.