Today in History - April 13

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Thomas Jefferson

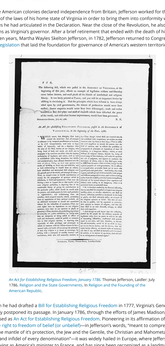
Thomas Jefferson was born on **April 13**, 1743, at Shadwell in Albemarle County, Virginia.[1] He was educated at the College of William and Mary and read law under the eminent Virginia jurist George Wythe. A member of the group of Virginia radicals who opposed Parliamentary policy from the early stages of the American Revolution, Jefferson came to special prominence in 1774 as the author of the influential pamphlet *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*. The following year he was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he was chosen to draft the Declaration of Independence at the age of thirty-three.

> *Let me describe to you a man, not yet forty, tall and with a mild and pleasing countenance.... An American, who without ever having quitted his own country, is at once a musician, skilled in drawing, a geometrician, an astronomer, a natural philosopher, legislator, and statesman.... Sometimes natural philosophy, at others politics or the arts, were the topics of our conversation, for no object escaped Mr. Jefferson; and it seemed as if from his youth he had placed his mind, as he has done his house, on an elevated situation, from which he might contemplate the universe.*
>
> Travels in North America, in the Years 1780-81-82, by the Marquis de Chastellux. New York: s.n. 1828. p.227> American Notes: Travels in America, 1750 to 1920. *General Collections*

Thomas Jefferson, Third President of the United States. Gilbert Stuart, artist; Boston Pendleton's Lithography, ca. 1825-1828. Popular Graphic Arts. Prints & Photographs Division

Thomas Jefferson. *Original Rough Draught of the Declaration of Independence*. June 1776. Thomas Jefferson, An American Treasures of the Library of Congress. Manuscript Division

After the American colonies declared independence from Britain, Jefferson worked for the revision of the laws of his home state of Virginia in order to bring them into conformity with the principles he had articulated in the Declaration. Near the close of the Revolution, he also served two terms as Virginia's governor. After a brief retirement that ended with the death of his young wife of ten years, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson, in 1782, Jefferson returned to Congress and crafted legislation that laid the foundation for governance of America's western territories.



An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, January 1786. Thomas Jefferson, Leader; July 1786. Religion and the State Governments, in Religion and the Founding of the American Republic.

Although he had drafted a Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1777, Virginia's General Assembly postponed its passage. In January 1786, through the efforts of James Madison, the bill was passed as An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom. Pioneering in its affirmation of the absolute right to freedom of belief (or unbelief)—in Jefferson's words, "meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo and infidel of every denomination"—it was widely hailed in Europe, where Jefferson was then serving as America's minister to France, and has since been recognized as a landmark in the development of human rights.

Returning to the United States after the ratification of the Constitution, Jefferson served as the nation's first secretary of state and then as its vice president. During these years, he became the first leader of one of the nation's two earliest political parties, the Republican Party, from which today's Democratic Party descends.

In the election of 1800, which he and his followers framed as a contest between aristocratic Federalists and the more democratic Republicans, Jefferson defeated his old friend John Adams to become the third president of the United States. In that capacity he skillfully merged the roles of president and party leader, setting a precedent that all presidents since have followed. Highlights of his two-term presidency included the acquisition of the vast Louisiana Territory from France and Jefferson's initiation and guidance of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Thomas Jefferson's home "Monticello" in Charlottesville, Virginia. Carol M. Highsmith, photographer; [between 1980 and 2006]. Highsmith (Carol M.) Archive. Prints & Photographs Division

These achievements were in some measure offset in his second term by the Embargo of the Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson requested that only three of his many accomplishments be noted on his tomb at Monticello: "Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia."[2]

Thomas Jefferson, Leader. Religion and the State Governments, in Religion and the Founding of the American Republic.

The last years of his life were spent in retirement at his Virginia estate, Monticello[2], in the house he designed[2]. Although Jefferson had no formal architectural training, his influential designs and lifelong commitment to the importance of architecture in the life of the nation did much to establish a distinctively American classicism. And in the eight years before his death on July 4, 1826—the fiftieth anniversary of American independence—Jefferson founded, designed, and directed the building of the University of Virginia.[2]

University of Va., Charlottesville, Va. Haines Photo Co., c1909. Panoramic Photographs. Prints & Photographs Division

The Thomas Jefferson Papers, 1606 to 1827, includes approximately 27,000 documents, or some 83,000 images, from the Library's collection of Jefferson's papers, which is the largest group of original Jefferson documents in the world. The online version of the collection also includes additional features such as an essay on Jefferson by the historian Joseph J. Ellis and timelines of Jefferson's life and of early Virginia history whose records Jefferson collected and preserved with his own.

1. With the interpretation of more accurately reflecting a solar year, the Julian ("Old Style") Calendar was replaced by the Gregorian Calendar in 1752. At that time Thomas Jefferson's April 2, 1743, birth date was adjusted to the "New Style" date of April 13, 1743. (Return to text)

Learn More

- For letters and documents related to the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, search the collection of Jefferson's papers on religious *freedom*.
- To retrieve images of Jefferson's correspondence with the Marquis de Chastellux, who visited him in 1782, search the Thomas Jefferson Papers on the keyword *Chastellux*.
- Read the book in which Chastellux describes his visit to Jefferson in the collection American Notes: Travels in America, 1750 to 1920.
- The exhibit Thomas Jefferson focuses on the life of this multifaceted Founding Father. It traces Jefferson's intellectual development from his earliest days to his twilight years.
- Explore the library Jefferson sold to Congress, which became the foundation of today's Library of Congress, in the online exhibition Thomas Jefferson's Library.
- The online exhibition Declaring Independence: Drafting the Documents gives more background on the process by which the Declaration of Independence reached the form in which it is known today.
- See Religion and the State Governments from the exhibit Religion and the Founding of the American Republic to learn more about Virginia's Act for Establishing Religious Freedom drafted by Jefferson.
- The American Treasures of the Library of Congress online exhibition includes many artifacts of Thomas Jefferson among its Top Treasures. The exhibition itself is organized according to Jefferson's classification scheme for his library:
  - Memory (History)
  - Reason (Philosophy)
  - Imagination (Fine Arts)

  Materials in each of the three sections reflect Jefferson's interest in many subjects other than statecraft. Don't miss his recipe for vanilla ice cream and his design for a pasta machine!
- For more background on Jefferson's contribution to the Congressional Library, read the publication Jefferson's Legacy: A Brief History of the Library of Congress by John Y. Cole, Library of Congress Historian and former director of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress.
- Search for historical documents of the United States Congress as well as current legislation using Congress.gov, a project originally started for Jefferson's 250th birthday in the spirit of his belief in the importance of the people's participation in their government.
- To find out more about Jefferson's architecture, search on the word *Monticello* or on the exact phrase *University of Virginia*. Virginia State Capitol, or *Maison Carrée* in the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS/HAER).
- Find information for many more materials about Jefferson in the online guide Thomas Jefferson: An American Man for All Seasons, and in the Related Resources section of the Library's online collection of Jefferson's papers.

Grand Old Flag

Although it did not become official until July 4, on **April 13**, 1818, a new flag was flown over the U.S. Capitol for the first time. The flag's thirteen stripes represented the original colonies; its twenty stars symbolized the number of states in the Union at that time. Congressman Peter H. Wendover arranged for the flag to be hoisted over the Capitol in Washington D.C. on the same day it was received there. The flag was made by sewing *Office and War* of 1812 hero, Samuel C. Reid. Wendover and Reid had collaborated on a bill to standardize the addition of stars on the flag to correspond to states in the union. Reid designed the flag; his wife and her friends sewed it.

Design of various flags and the "National Colours." — As Adopted by Congress in 1818 / Samuel Chester Reid family papers. Pen and ink and watercolor drawing, February 17, 1850. Memory Gallery > American Treasures of the Library of Congress. Manuscript Division.

Reid arranged the 20 stars to form one large star on the blue canton of this flag. He described this design in a letter to his son decades later. American flags with the stars arranged this way came to be known as *great star* or *grand luminary*flags. The arrangement of stars on American flags would not be standardized until 1912 when the flag was changed from 46 to 48 stars.

U.S. Capitol Exterior, Flag and Gas Front of U.S. Capitol. Theodor Horydczak, photographer, ca 1920-1950. Horydczak Collection. Prints & Photographs Division

The first national flag, embellished with thirteen stripes and thirteen stars, was modified in 1795 when Kentucky and Vermont entered the Union after Congress passed the Flag Act of 1795 calling for 15 stripes and 15 stars. The PL McHenry flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write The Star Spangled Banner during the War of 1812 met this standard.

Continued expansion of the Union meant Congress soon again faced the prospect of adding to the number of the flag's stars and stripes. Thus, in 1818, Congress settled on the expediency of altering the flag according to its present formula whereby stripes represent the original thirteen colonies and stars represent the states of the Union.

colonies, and stars are coincident with the number of states in the Union. The Independence Day following the admission of a state was set as the occasion for adding new stars to the flag. After Hawaii became a state on August 21, 1959, the fiftieth star was added to the flag on July 4, 1960.

You're a grand old flag. George M. Cohan, words and music; New York: F.A. Mills, c1906. Patriotic Melodies. Music Division

Read about and view sheet music of "You're a Grand Old Flag," composed George M. Cohan in 1906, and first published as You're a Grand Old Rag, in the Music Division's Patriotic Melodies collection. The essay also includes links to a recording of the song by tenor, Billy Murray from 1906, and to three recent recordings by United States military bands: the U.S. Air Force Band, the U.S. Coast Guard Band, and the U.S. Marine Band.

You're a grand old flag

You're a grand old flag

00:00 00:39

Share

U. S. Coast Guard Band, New London, CT (performer)

Learn More

- Search on *flag* in Horydczak Collection to explore a large assemblage of photographs of flags flying over the U.S. Capitol and elsewhere in the District of Columbia.
- View mages of two other great star/grand luminary American flags in the Library's collections: one was used as a political campaign banner for Lincoln and Hamlin in 1860 and the other is on an illustrated advertising label for Know Nothing Soap printed in 1854.
- Search the collection Inventing Entertainment: the Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies on *flag* to view several films featuring the Stars and Stripes including *Raising Old Glory over Morro Castle* and *Morning Colors on U.S. Cruiser "Raleigh"*.
- The Patriotic Melodies collection includes historical information, sheet music, and sound recordings for a variety of patriotic songs, including songs about the American flag.
- Search across the notated music offerings using the term *flag* to see more than a thousand songs about flags.

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