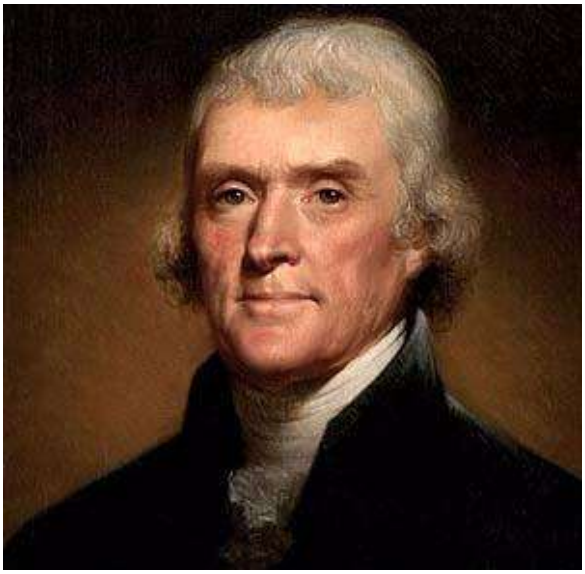
Thomas Jefferson



3rd President of the United States,
1801 – 1809
"Author of the Declaration of Independence"

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743 at Shadwell, a frontier plantation in Virginia. He was the third of ten children. His father Peter Jefferson was a farmer and a planter, who died when Thomas was 14.

Jefferson was a tall and thin boy with a freckled face and sandy hair. He was home schooled until he was 9, and then attended a church school where he learned Latin, Greek, French, and science. When he was 16, he entered William and Mary College where he studied math, science, and philosophy. He graduated from college when he was 19. Before he was 30 years old, Jefferson had studied half a dozen languages, law, mathematics, science, and philosophy. A self-taught architect, he designed some beautiful homes in the style of Italian architect Palladio. As an inventor, he created the American system of money, the swivel chair, a type of pedometer to measure how far a person walked, and a machine that would copy writing.



Jefferson's home Monticello
Click the link to tour his home
http://home.monticello.org/

When he was 26 years old, Jefferson was elected to the Virginia legislature, where he was to write many letters and articles about the growing conflict between the Colonies and Great Britain. His opposition to England became so strong that the British declared him a traitor to be hanged once he was seized.

In 1772 he married Martha Wayles Skelton, a widow. During their decade of life together, she gave birth to six children, but only two, Martha and Mary survived. Jefferson described his marriage to Martha as one of the happiest times of his life.

In 1775, he was elected to the Continental Congress and assigned to the five-man committee chosen to write the Declaration of Independence. His associates in the group delegated the task to him because they believed he was the best writer.

After the war, Jefferson succeeded Benjamin Franklin as Minister to France (1785-89). When the new Constitution was adopted and George Washington was elected President, Jefferson was appointed Secretary of State (1790-93).

During Jefferson's term as Secretary of State, he often feuded with Alexander Hamilton on most aspects of national policy. Hamilton believed that the educated aristocracy should run the government, and Jefferson believed it should be run by common people. Jefferson opposed a strong central government, instead favoring states' rights. Soon, such political and philosophical

conflicts resulted in the formation of the Federalist Party and the Democratic-Republican Party, which Jefferson co-founded with James Madison. In 1793, because of Washington's growing reliance on Hamilton for advice on foreign affairs, Jefferson resigned as Secretary of State.

In 1796, Jefferson lost the Presidential election to Federalist John Adams by only three electoral votes. However, because the Constitution did not yet provide separate tickets for the President and the Vice President, Jefferson became the Vice President (1797-1801), despite the fact that he was a member of the opposing party.

In 1800, after a tie-breaking election in the Federalist-controlled House of Representatives, Jefferson captured the Presidency, while his opponent Aaron Burr became Vice President. Jefferson was the first President to take the oath of office in Washington, D. C.

On July 4, 1801, President Jefferson held a reception in the Blue Room at the White House, where he introduced the custom of shaking his guests' hands rather than bowing stiffly, a custom observed by Presidents Washington and Adams. In 1804, Jefferson was elected for a second term.


Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery

Jefferson's greatest achievements were in the area of westward expansion. Believing that the future of the United States lay in the West, Jefferson sent his diplomats to Paris to draw up the details of the Louisiana Purchase (1803), which doubled the size of the United States and extended its boundaries beyond the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. Additionally, he sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on an expedition to explore and map the new territory. The expedition lasted from May 1804 to September 1806 and obtained a wealth of scientific and geographic knowledge, including knowledge of many Indian tribes.

Jefferson refused to be elected to a third term because he did not believe that any man should be President for more than two terms. He went back to his beautiful home, Monticello ("little mountain"), where he corresponded with and entertained statesmen, politicians, scholars, scientists, explorers, and Indian chiefs. Jefferson also planned and helped build the University of Virginia. Falling into debt, the former President was forced to sell his library to the government. This eventually became the start of the Library of Congress, the largest library in the world.

Jefferson died on the same day as John Adams, July 4, 1826 – exactly 50 years after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson wrote the words to go on his gravestone: "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, of the stature of Virginia for religious freedom, and father of the University of Virginia." Oddly, he did not mention having been President of the United States.