Thomas Jefferson

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Thomas Jefferson was born April 13, 1743, in Albemarle County, Virginia. When he was 14, he inherited his father's estate and slaves. Soon after, Jefferson attended the College of William and Mary.

In 1769, when he was just 26, Jefferson was elected to the Virginia House of Representatives. The following year, he marries Martha Wayles Skelton. In 1772, Jefferson began building his home, Monticello.

As a member of the Second Continental Congress, Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In 1779, he was elected as the governor of Virginia. Although he resigned in 1781, during his term as governor, he wrote his famous statute on religious freedom. Jefferson's writings also formed the basis of the Ordinances of 1784, 1785, and 1787. From 1785-1789, Jefferson served as minister to France. In 1789, George Washington appointed him Secretary of State.

Due to political differences concerning the role of the government with other cabinet members, Jefferson resigned as Secretary of State in 1793. He next ran for president but was defeated in 1796 by John Adams. Nevertheless, Jefferson was appointed vice president. Although he and Aaron Burr received equal electoral votes for presidency, Jefferson was elected president by the House of Representatives in 1800. During Jefferson's presidency, both the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition occurred. Jefferson served two presidential terms. He later established the University of Virginia. He died on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Coincidentally, John Adams died on the same day.