

READING THE NEWS

Presidents' Day is celebrated each February to honor George Washington and other presidents who have served our nation.

The first public celebration of George Washington's birthday was held over 200 years ago by French officers to honor George Washington as the commander in chief of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Within a few years, Washington's birthday became an annual celebration in towns across the country. Balls, banquets, toasts, and speeches were given in his honor because Americans saw George Washington as the symbol of their unity and independence.

Some people, however, viewed George Washington's popularity with concern. They thought the public celebrations were like those offered for kings. It was hard for them to believe that, in a time when much of the world was ruled by kings, George Washington would not seize power. The newspaper account from the Massachusetts Gazette was written in 1787 and describes a typical 18th century dinner honoring George Washington on his birthday. Although his birthday has been celebrated since the 1780s, it did not become an official holiday until 1885.