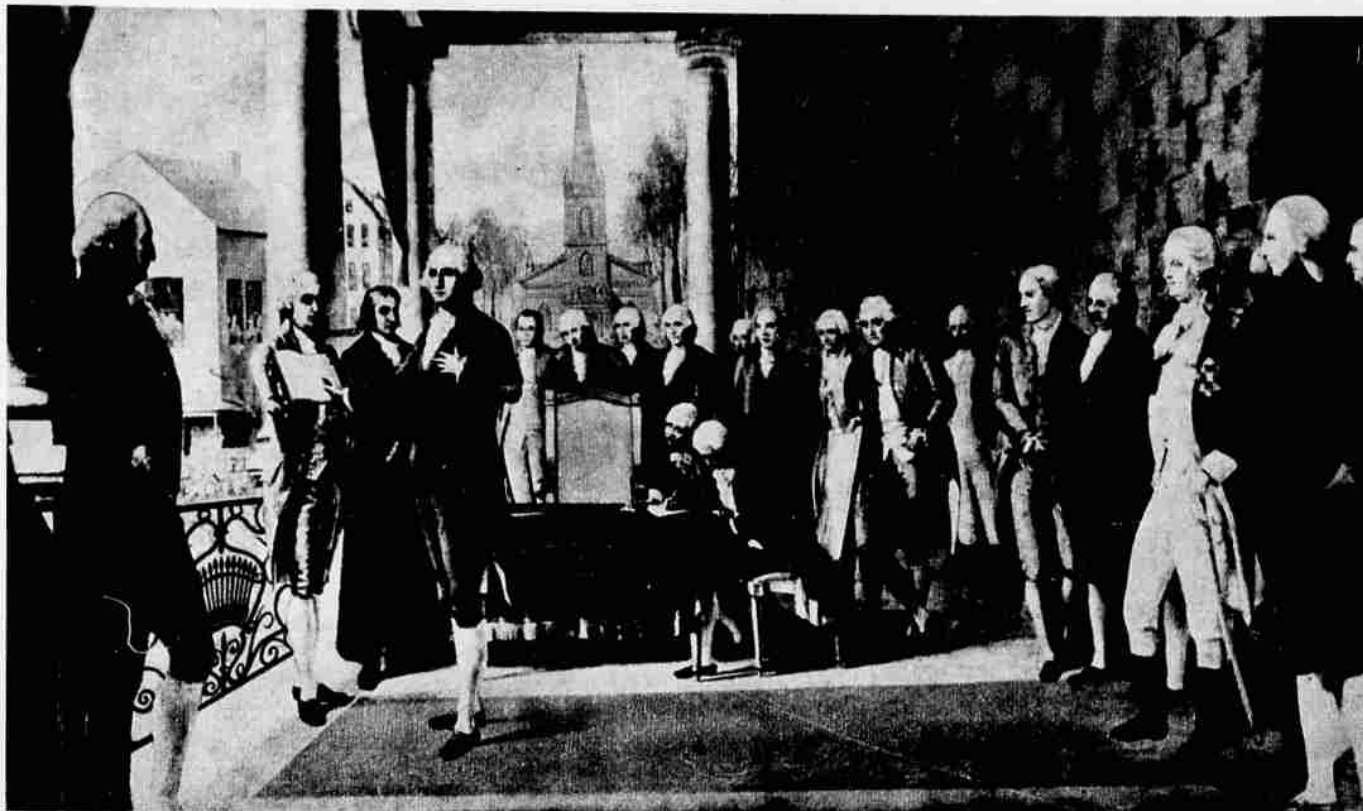




America's Lost Birthday

When was our nation really born?

Many people say it was April 30, the day Washington was inaugurated President in 1789.

by William F. McDermott

ONE BIRTHDAY FOR AMERICA—or three? I vote for the latter. Let's list them:

July 4, the *first* birthday, when the idea of sovereignty for the colonies was ratified in the Declaration of Independence.

September 17, the *second* birthday, when the pattern for a united nation was set forth in the Constitution.

April 30, the *third* birthday, when George Washington was inaugurated first President, and the newly established Government began to operate.

Many believe the third to be the *real* birthday of our nation, because everything before was preliminary to its actual functioning. Some call it our "lost" birthday because few people remember it.

The anniversary might well be called "National Day," and fluttering flags, parades, and general jubilation be made part of its observance next Wednesday. That April 30 in 1789—169 years ago—saw such festivities. Was not the great Revolutionary hero and idol, George Washington, taking office as first President of the United States of America?

March 4 had been set as the official inauguration date, but impassable roads and primitive methods of procedure first delayed the scheduled November election until January, then the assembling and counting of ballots. April arrived before the tabulation was complete. Washington was notified of his election on April 14. Then began his journey to New York.

Acclaiming crowds greeted him as he made his triumphal journey; girls in white strewed his pathway through Trenton, N. J., with flowers. High officials-elect of the new Government escorted him from Elizabethtown, N. J., to New York.

April 30 was named the great day. The setting was Federal Hall in Wall Street—no skyscrapers then to

throw deep shadows across it. The inauguration took place on the balcony, while cheering throngs lined the streets and watched from nearby buildings.

A hush settled over the scene as the brief ceremonies proceeded with deep solemnity and Washington, with bared head, was sworn into office. Then cannons at the Battery boomed salutes and the crowds broke out in applause. The new President proceeded to the Senate and gave his immortal inauguration address.

It was truly a great day in history—not only for America, but for the world, for then in actuality began the unique and impressive American "way of life." All that had gone before was, in a sense, preparation for this dramatic moment.

Yet this *real* birthday was soon forgotten—but to be revived with great gusto on its centennial. April 30, 1889, was heralded as the "100th anniversary of the inauguration of the United States of America," and its observance was truly national.

New York made a big occasion of it, spotlighting the fact that it was the scene of the Government's birth. Chicago hailed the day with much festivity, issuing a proclamation naming April 30 as "National Day," affirming that it was of *greater importance to America than Independence Day*, and urging that it be as universally and enthusiastically observed. It called the launching of the new Government "a momentous and far-reaching event, the most important in the history of modern times," and said it "formally ushered the United States into the family of nations."

But history repeated itself. For a second time "National Day" disappeared from public recognition.

Yet it could be reclaimed again. Surely it deserves recognition and appreciation *every year*. It is the *true* birthday of the United States as a nation, and *though* it is our "lost" birthday now, it could be "*found*" again if the people demanded it!



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