

# George Clinton (vice president)

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**George Clinton** (July 26 [O.S. July 15] 1739 – April 20, 1812) was an American soldier and statesman, considered one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. He was Governor of New York from 1777 to 1795, and again from 1801 to 1804, then served as the fourth Vice President of the United States from 1805 to 1812, under Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. He and John C. Calhoun are the only people to have served as US vice president under two different presidents.

## Contents

- 1 Early life
  - 1.1 French and Indian War service
- 2 Political career
  - 2.1 Revolutionary War
  - 2.2 Governor
    - 2.2.1 Threats to conquer Vermont
  - 2.3 Vice President
- 3 Marriage and children
- 4 Legacy
- 5 See also
- 6 Notes
- 7 References
- 8 External links

## Early life

Clinton was born in Little Britain, Province of New York to Charles and Elizabeth Denniston Clinton, Presbyterian immigrants who left County Longford, Ireland, in 1729 to escape an Anglican regime that imposed severe disabilities on religious dissenters. His political interests were inspired by his father, who was a farmer, surveyor, and land speculator, and served as a member of the New York colonial assembly.<sup>[1]</sup> George Clinton was the brother of General James Clinton and the uncle of New York's future governor, DeWitt Clinton. George was tutored by a local Scottish clergyman.

## French and Indian War service

### George Clinton



**4th Vice President of the United States**

#### In office

March 4, 1805 – April 20, 1812

**President** Thomas Jefferson  
James Madison

**Preceded by** Aaron Burr

**Succeeded by** Elbridge Gerry

#### 1st & 3rd Governor of New York

#### In office

July 30, 1777 – June 30, 1795

**Lieutenant** Pierre Van Cortlandt

**Preceded by** Inaugural holder

**Succeeded by** John Jay

#### In office

July 1, 1801 – June 30, 1804

**Lieutenant** Jeremiah Van Rensselaer

**Preceded by** John Jay

**Succeeded by** Morgan Lewis

#### Personal details

**Born** July 26, 1739  
Little Britain, Province of New

During the French and Indian War he first served on a privateer, before enlisting in the provincial militia, where his father held the rank of Colonel. During the French and Indian War George rose to the rank of Lieutenant, accompanying his father in 1758 on Bradstreet's 1758 seizure of Fort Frontenac, cutting one of the major communication and supply lines between the eastern centres of Montreal and Quebec City and France's western territories. He and his brother James were instrumental in capturing a French vessel.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Political career



Coat of Arms of George Clinton

His father's survey of the New York frontier so impressed the governor that he was offered a position as sheriff of New York City and the surrounding county in 1748. After the elder Clinton declined the honor, the governor later designated George as successor to the Clerk of the Ulster County Court of Common Pleas, a position he would assume in 1759 and hold for the next 52 years.<sup>[3]</sup>


After the war, he read law in New York City under the attorney William Smith. He returned home (which at that time was part of Ulster County) and began his legal practice in 1764. He became district attorney the following year.<sup>[1]</sup> He was a member of the New York Provincial Assembly for Ulster County from 1768 to 1776, aligned with the anti-British Livingston faction.<sup>[4]</sup> His brother James was a member of the Provincial Convention that assembled in New York City on April 20, 1775.

## Revolutionary War

A month after the first open armed conflict in Lexington, the Continental Congress resolved on May 25, 1775, to build fortifications in the Hudson highlands for the purpose of protecting and maintaining control of the Hudson River. James Clinton and Christopher Tappan, lifetime residents of the area, were sent to scout appropriate locations.

## Governor

In December 1775 the New York Provincial Congress commissioned him brigadier general in the militia tasked with defending the Highlands of the Hudson River from British attack. To this end he built two forts and stretched a giant chain across the river to keep the British forces in New York City from sailing northward. On

	York
<b>Died</b>	April 20, 1812 (aged 72) Washington, D.C.
<b>Resting place</b>	Old Dutch Churchyard, Kingston, New York
<b>Nationality</b>	American
<b>Political party</b>	Democratic-Republican
<b>Spouse(s)</b>	Sarah Cornelia Tappen (August 10, 1741 - March 15, 1800)
<b>Children</b>	Catharine Clinton Cornelia Tappen Clinton George Washington Clinton Elizabeth Clinton Martha Washington Clinton Maria Clinton
<b>Religion</b>	Presbyterian
<b>Signature</b>	
	<b>Military service</b>
<b>Service/branch</b>	British Army Continental Army
<b>Rank</b>	Lieutenant (UK) Brigadier General (USA)
<b>Battles/wars</b>	French and Indian War American Revolutionary War



Clinton's pew, St. Paul's Chapel NYC

March 25, 1777, he was commissioned a brigadier general in the Continental Army. In June 1777, he was elected at the same time Governor and Lieutenant Governor of New York. He formally resigned the Lieutenant Governor's office and took the oath of office as Governor on July 30.<sup>[5]</sup> He was re-elected five times, remaining in office until June 1795. Although he had been elected governor, he retained his commission in the Continental Army and commanded forces at Fort Clinton and Fort Montgomery on October 6, 1777. He remained in the Continental Army until it was disbanded on November 3, 1783.



Gubernatorial portrait of George Clinton.

He was known for his hatred of Tories<sup>[6]</sup> and used the seizure and sale of Tory estates to help keep taxes down. A supporter and friend of George Washington, he supplied food to the troops at Valley Forge, rode with Washington to the first inauguration and gave an impressive dinner to celebrate it.

In 1783, Clinton became an original member of the New York Society of the Cincinnati and served as its president from 1794 to 1795.

In 1783, at Dobbs Ferry, Clinton and Washington negotiated with General Sir Guy Carleton for the evacuation of the British troops from their remaining posts in the United States. In 1787–88, Clinton publicly opposed adoption of the new United States Constitution. Twentieth-century historian Herbert Storing identifies Clinton as "Cato", the pseudonymous author of the Anti-Federalist essays which appeared in New York newspapers during the ratification debates. However, the authorship of the essays is disputed. Clinton withdrew his objections after the Bill of Rights was added.

In 1792, he was chosen by the nascent Jeffersonian Republican party as their candidate for vice president. While the Republicans joined in the general acclamation of Washington for a second term as president, they objected to the allegedly "monarchical" attitude of Vice President John Adams. Clinton was nominated rather than Thomas Jefferson because the Virginia electors could not vote for Washington, and for a second Virginian. Clinton received 50 electoral votes to 77 for Adams. His candidacy was damaged by his anti-Federalist record and by his narrow and disputed re-election as governor in 1792. (He won by only 108 votes, and the substantial anti-Clinton vote of Otsego County was excluded on a technicality.)

He did not run for re-election as governor in 1795. He held no political office until he was elected to the New York State Assembly in April 1800, and was a member of the 24th New York State Legislature. In 1801, he was again elected governor, serving until 1804. With 21 years of service, he was the longest-serving governor of a U.S. state until December 14, 2015, when Iowa governor Terry Branstad surpassed him.<sup>[7]</sup>

### Threats to conquer Vermont

The land that is in present-day the state of Vermont was before 1764 a disputed territory claimed by the colonies of New Hampshire and New York. During 1749–64 it was governed as a *de facto* part of New Hampshire and many thousands of settlers arrived. In 1764 King George III awarded the disputed region, then called the New Hampshire Grants, to New York. New York refused to recognize property claims based on New Hampshire law, thus threatening the eviction of many settlers. Consequently, New York's authority was resisted by local authorities and the militia known as the Green Mountain Boys. In 1777, having no further hope of rulings from the king or courts of England to protect their property, the politicians of the disputed territory declared it an independent state to be called Vermont. Vermont's repeated petitions for admission to the Union over the next several years were denied by the Continental Congress, in large part because of opposition from the state of New York and its governor George Clinton.

In 1778 Clinton wrote to some Vermonters loyal to New York, encouraging them

"to Oppose the ridiculous and destructive Scheme of erecting those Lands into an Independent State."<sup>[8]</sup>

On March 2, 1784, the legislature of New York, with Clinton's support, instructed its Congressional delegates to "press Congress for a decision in the long protracted controversy" and that New York would have to

"recur to force, for the preservation of her lawful authority."<sup>[9]</sup>

and that if Congress would not act, then New York would be

"destitute of the protection of the United States."

However, a Congressional committee recommended recognition of Vermont and its admission to the Union. The committee's recommended bill was opposed by New York's delegates and did not pass. Six years later the New York legislature decided to give up New York's claims to Vermont on condition that Congress would admit Vermont to the Union, and the new state was admitted on March 4, 1791.

## Vice President

Clinton was selected as President Jefferson's running mate in the 1804 presidential election, replacing Aaron Burr. He served as the fourth Vice President of the United States, first under Jefferson, from 1805 to 1809, and then under President James Madison from 1809 until his death from a heart attack in 1812. Clinton attempted to challenge Madison for the presidency in 1808, but was outmaneuvered by Madison's supporters when the congressional nominating caucus chose him as the vice presidential nominee. Clinton received six electoral votes for president, but won re-election as vice president instead. Clinton's nephew, DeWitt Clinton, challenged Madison in 1812 after George Clinton's death.<sup>[10]</sup>

Clinton was the first vice president to die in office as well as the first vice president to die overall. Clinton was the first of two vice presidents to serve in the position under two different presidents. (John C. Calhoun was the other.)

## Marriage and children

On February 7, 1770, Clinton married Sarah Cornelia Tappen (died 1800); they had five daughters and one son:

1. Catharine Clinton (November 5, 1770 – January 10, 1811); married firstly, to John Taylor, and secondly Pierre Van Cortlandt, Jr.
2. Cornelia Tappen Clinton (June 29, 1774 – March 28, 1810); married Edmond-Charles Genet
3. George Washington Clinton (October 18, 1778 – March 27, 1813); married Anna Floyd, daughter of William Floyd
4. Elizabeth Clinton (July 10, 1780 – April 8, 1825); married Matthias B. Tallmadge
5. Martha Washington Clinton (October 12, 1783 – February 20, 1795)
6. Maria Clinton (October 6, 1785 – April 17, 1829); married Dr. Stephen D. Beekman, a grandson of Pierre Van Cortlandt

His original burial was in Washington, D.C. He was re-interred at the Old Dutch Churchyard in Kingston, New York in 1908.<sup>[11]</sup> He is of no known relation to the 42nd President, Bill Clinton, who was born William Jefferson Blythe III but took the surname of his stepfather.

## Legacy

Historian Alan Taylor described George Clinton as that "The astutest politician in Revolutionary New York," a man who "understood the power of symbolism and the new popularity of a plain style especially when practiced by a man with the means and accomplishments to set himself above the common people."<sup>[1]</sup> His marriage to Cornelia Tappen strengthened his political position in heavily Dutch Ulster County.<sup>[4]</sup>

Clinton County, New York; Clinton County, Ohio; and the village of Clinton, Oneida County, New York (site of Hamilton College) are all named for him. In Washington, D.C. there is a gilded equestrian sculpture of him on Connecticut Avenue.

In 1873, the state of New York donated a bronze statue of Clinton to the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall Collection.<sup>[12]</sup> In 1787 Clinton was depicted on an unauthorized copper coin minted privately in New York with "EXCELSIOR" on reverse.<sup>[13]</sup>

He was depicted in John Trumbull's Declaration of Independence even though he neither signed it nor was present when it was signed. In 1976 the painting appeared on the reverse of the two dollar bill and printed again in series 1995 and 2003.

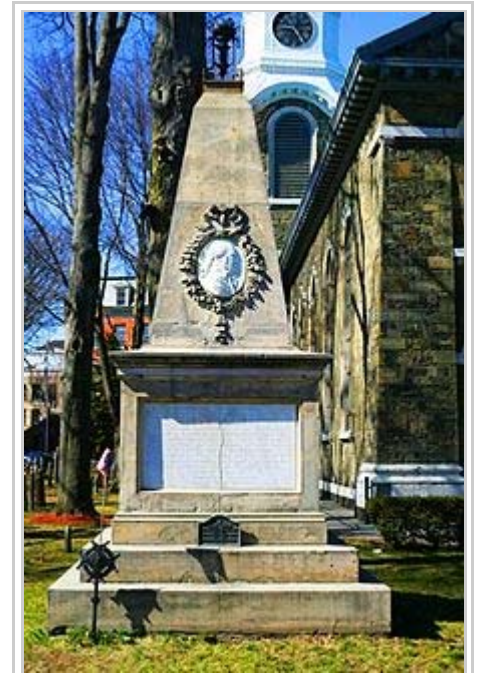
In 2000, the State of New York ceremonially renamed the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge in honor of Clinton.<sup>[14]</sup>

## See also

- Pierre Van Cortlandt, Clinton's lieutenant governor and brother-in-law

## Notes

1. "George Clinton, 4th Vice President (1805–1812)", United States Senate ([http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/VP\\_George\\_Clinton.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/VP_George_Clinton.htm))
2. Campbell, William W. (1849), *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton*, Baker and Scribner, pp. xv–xvii, retrieved 2008-02-09
3. "A Revolutionary Day Along Historic US Route 9W". Revolutionaryday.com. 1908-05-30. Retrieved 2013-02-27.
4. Kaminski, John P., "Clinton, George", *The Encyclopedia of New York State*, (Peter Eisenstadt, ed.), Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005
5. *George Clinton: Yeoman Politician of the New Republic* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=IhGflokDzmAC&pg=PA24>) by John P. Kaminski, New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, University of Wisconsin--Madison Center for the Study of the American Constitution (Rowman & Littlefield, 1993, ISBN 0-945612-17-6 , ISBN 978-0-945612-17-9 , page 24)
6. "George Clinton". Architect of the Capitol. Retrieved 2013-02-27.
7. CQ Guide to U.S. Elections
8. George Clinton to Micah Townsend and Israel Smith, June 3, 1778, reprinted in Hugh Hastings, comp., *Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York*, eight volumes. (Albany, New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Company, James B. Lyon and Olver A. Quayle, State Printers, 1899–1904), 3: 396–398.
9. Instructions to the Delegates of New York in the Congress of the United States, March 2, 1784, reprinted at *Records*



The grave monument of George Clinton in Kingston, New York

*of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*. Eight volumes. Montpelier, Vermont, Steam Press of J. & J. M. Poland, 1873–1880.

10. Morgan, William G. (1969). "The Origin and Development of the Congressional Nominating Caucus". *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* **113** (2): 188–191. Retrieved 12 October 2015.
11. George Clinton (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=209>) at *Find a Grave*
12. "Clinton genealogy site". Rootsweb.com. Retrieved 2013-02-27.
13. "Copper coin: George Clinton Copper – 1787". 2020site.org. Retrieved 2013-02-27.
14. "The George Clinton Bridge" ([http://www.nysba.state.ny.us/bridgepages/KRB/KRBpage/krb\\_page.htm](http://www.nysba.state.ny.us/bridgepages/KRB/KRBpage/krb_page.htm)); accessed 2010-09-13

## References

- Kaminski, John P. *George Clinton: Yeoman Politician of the New Republic*. Madison House, 1993.

## External links

- The George Clinton Collection at the New York Historical Society (<http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/nyhs/georgeclinton/index.html>)



Wikimedia Commons has media related to ***George Clinton***.

- United States Congress. "George Clinton (id: C000527)". *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.
- Architect of the Capitol: George Clinton (<http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/clinton.cfm>)
- An examination of the Clinton Lineage (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~wynkoop/webdocs/clinton.htm>)
- Barbagallo, Tricia (March 10, 2007). "Fellow Citizens Read a Horrid Tale" (PDF). Retrieved 2008-06-04.

Political offices		
Preceded by <b>Aaron Burr</b>	<b>Vice President of the United States</b> March 4, 1805 – April 20, 1812	Succeeded by <b>Elbridge Gerry</b>
Preceded by <b>John Jay</b>	<b>Governor of New York</b> 1801–1804	Succeeded by <b>Morgan Lewis</b>
Preceded by <i>Governor of the Province of New York</i>	<b>Governor of New York</b> 1777–1795	Succeeded by <b>John Jay</b>
Party political offices		
Preceded by <b>Aaron Burr</b> <sup>(1)</sup>	<b>Democratic-Republican nominee for Vice President of the United States</b> 1804, 1808	Succeeded by <b>Elbridge Gerry</b>
Preceded by <b>New position</b>	<b>Democratic-Republican nominee</b> <sup>(1)</sup> <b> for Vice President of the United States</b> 1792	Succeeded by <b>Aaron Burr</b> <sup>(1)</sup>
Academic offices		
Preceded by <b>Benjamin Moore Acting</b>	<b>President of Columbia College Acting</b> 1784–1787	Succeeded by <b>William Samuel Johnson as President</b>
Preceded by <b>new office</b>	<b>Chancellor of the University of the State of New York</b> 1787–1795	Succeeded by <b>John Jay</b>
Preceded by <b>John Jay</b>	<b>Chancellor of the University of the State of New York</b> 1802–1804	Succeeded by <b>Morgan Lewis</b>
Notes and references		
<p>1. Prior to the passage of the Twelfth Amendment in 1804, each presidential elector would cast two votes; the highest vote-getter with a majority would become President and the runner-up would become Vice President. In 1792, with George Washington as the prohibitive favorite to be elected President, the Democratic-Republican Party fielded Clinton with the intention that he be elected Vice President. Similarly, in both 1796 and 1800, the Democratic-Republican Party fielded both Aaron Burr and Thomas Jefferson, with the intention that Jefferson be elected President and Burr be elected Vice President.</p>		

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Categories: 1739 births | 1812 deaths | American people of Irish descent | American people of English descent | Continental Army generals | Continental Army officers from New York | Continental Congressmen from New York | Governors of New York | Jefferson administration cabinet members | Members of the New York State Assembly | Members of the New York Provincial Assembly | People from Kingston, New York | United States presidential candidates, 1789 | United States presidential candidates, 1792 | United States presidential candidates, 1796 | United States presidential candidates, 1808 | United States vice-presidential candidates, 1804 | United States vice-presidential candidates, 1808 | Vice Presidents of the United States

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