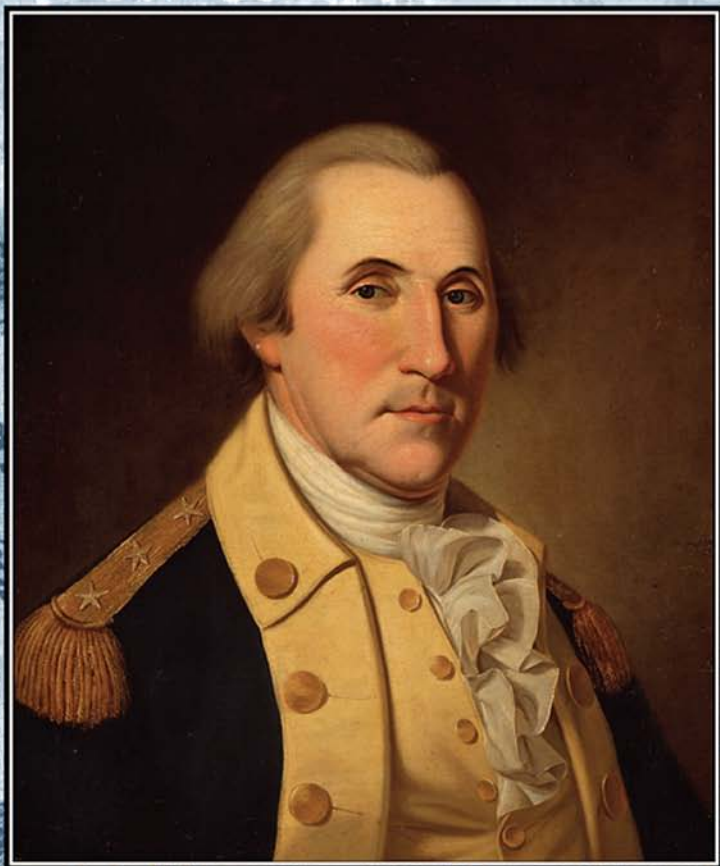


# The Life of George Washington

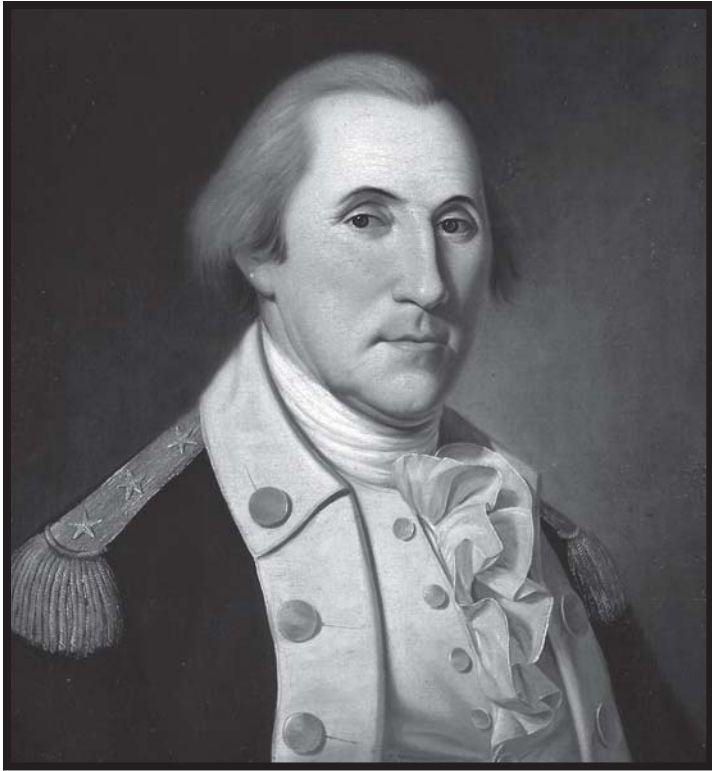


**Mary L. Williamson**

*Revised by Michael J. McHugh*



**THE LIFE  
OF  
GEORGE WASHINGTON**



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**MARY L. WILLIAMSON**

REVISED BY MICHAEL J. MCHUGH

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# PREFACE

More than two centuries have passed since the death of George Washington. Nevertheless, his accomplishments and godly character continue to shine with honor and dignity upon the pages of American history. Few men have done more to advance the cause of virtuous liberty than Washington. His legacy, therefore, is one that is worth studying and preserving so that each generation may know something of his honorable life.

George Washington lived during a period of great change and turmoil in North America. His great career began simply as a surveyor of lands for a wealthy landowner in the English colony known as Virginia. As a young man, he served in the English Army and fought bravely in the French and Indian War. After retiring to his estate at Mount Vernon, Washington served as a planter, a member of the Continental Congress, and also as a local magistrate. When the leaders of the English colonies determined to sever their political ties to the English crown, Washington took up the call to lead the colonial army in the War for American Independence. In the days after the fighting ceased, George Washington continued to serve his country during the formation of the U.S. Constitution and as the first President of the newly formed Union of States.

Regardless of the season or challenge, Washington never failed to live up to the call of duty, honor, and patriotic service. If young Americans living in the twenty-first century commit themselves to the task of imitating Washington's unselfish devotion to duty, then they will be well prepared to exercise the responsibilities of a people who have been set free to serve Almighty God. May God be pleased to use this brief study of the life of George Washington to strengthen and encourage a whole new generation of young patriots.

*Michael J. McHugh*  
*Arlington Heights, Illinois*  
*2004*



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## CHAPTER ONE

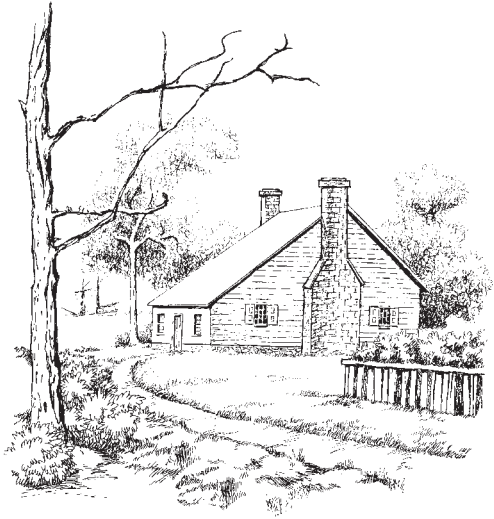
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# The Boy and Young Surveyor

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George Washington was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, on Feb. 22, 1732. George was baptized in the orthodox Episcopalian manner less than two months later. The Washington family in Virginia came from England and their heritage may be traced back to the century following the conquest of England by William of Normandy, A.D. 1066.



The feudal name of the family, De Wessyngton, is found many times in the chronicles of England. In the lapse of time, the name simply became Washington; and in 1546 we find a certain Lawrence Washington living at Sulgrove Manor, Northampton. He was a man of property and distinction, being Lord Mayor of Northampton. The family continued to reside at Sulgrove Manor until 1606, when Lawrence Washington, the grandson of the Lord Mayor, removed to the village of Little Brington, where his home and tomb may yet be found. This place, which is sometimes called the “Cradle of the Washingtons,” is only two hours’ journey by rail from London.

In the mid 1600s, England was just ending a long and bloody civil war to overthrow the tyrannical Stuarts from their throne. The general who led the revolt to establish a more free and just England was Oliver Cromwell. This leader

became Lord Protector in England from 1653–1658. The Washington family, like many wealthy upper-class English households, were royalists and, therefore, loyal to the Stuarts. While Cromwell was at the head of the government, the two sons of the Rev. Lawrence Washington, John and Lawrence, decided to come to Virginia. They arrived in 1657 and bought lands in Westmoreland County, between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers—the region called the “Northern Neck.” John, whom we afterwards find as Colonel Washington, leading the Virginia troops against the Indians, became a noted planter, a magistrate, and a member of the House of Burgesses. Augustine, his grandson, was the father of our hero, George Washington.

Augustine Washington is described as a tall man of noble bearing, with a fair complexion and fine gray eyes. He was a worthy man and commanded the respect of his neighbors. He married Jane Butler and settled down as a planter in Westmoreland County. In 1728, his wife died, leaving him four children, of whom only two lived to manhood. Two years later, he married Mary Ball, the beautiful belle of the Northern Neck of Virginia.

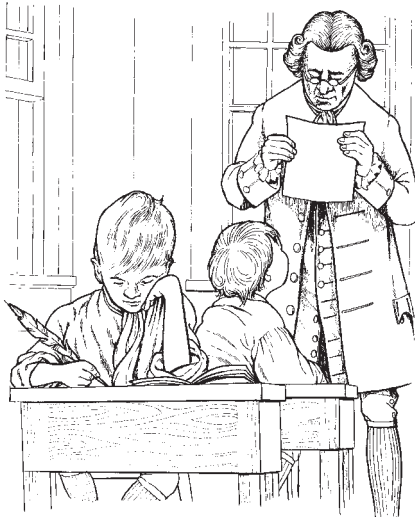
The young bride had passed her life quietly at Epping Forest, her father’s country seat, where she had been carefully trained in all the domestic duties of her day. Though she had little book learning, she must have possessed a commanding character, as we are told that her sons, though “proper, tall fellows,” were known to sit as “mute as mice” in her presence.

For several years after his second marriage, Augustine Washington resided in the old homestead on Bridges Creek, where George, the eldest child by his second marriage, was born. A few years later, the homestead was burned, and he moved to an estate in Stafford County, opposite Fredericksburg. Here he died in April 1743.

Besides her stepsons, the young widow was left with five children of her own—George, Elizabeth, Samuel, John, and Charles. To these children she devoted her life, being

entrusted with the care of all their property until they should each come of age. A charming picture has been given us of Mary Washington with her children gathered round her, reading to them from her favorite volume, Sir Matthew Hale's *Contemplations, Moral and Divine*. This book, bearing her name written with her own hand, may still be seen at Mount Vernon.

Augustine Washington's large possessions were divided by will among his children; the home and the estate on the Rappahannock (Mount Vernon) was to become the property of George when he should reach the age of twenty-one.



During his father's lifetime, George went to a school directed by an old man named Hobby, who doubtless taught him to read, write, and work with numbers. When he was about eight years old, his half-brother Lawrence, who had been sent to England to complete his education, returned home an accomplished young gentleman. A remarkable affection now sprang up between Lawrence and his little brother,

which lasted as long as the former lived and which had great influence upon the life of George.

Lawrence Washington must have inherited some of the military spirit of his ancestors, for we find him, when twenty-two years of age, raising a company and joining a military expedition to the West Indies, commanded by Admiral Vernon, for the purpose of punishing the Spaniards for interfering with British commerce. Thus it came about that George received his first lessons in military affairs. He saw the prepa-

rations made for the expedition and afterward heard of the war through his brother.

Fighting mimic battles was at that time one of the favorite amusements of the pupils of the old-field school where young George attended. George entered into this sport with much pleasure. He was commander of one army, while a schoolmate named William Bustle led the opposing forces, and it is said that George was always victorious.

After his father's death, George was sent to school to a Mr. Williams at Bridges Creek. Here he learned to draft all kinds of deeds, bonds, and mercantile papers, for his teacher believed in giving boys a practical education. His manuscript books, which are still to be seen at Mount Vernon, are models of neatness. This training was of great service to him later in life, as he was always able to draft legal documents with the skill of a lawyer. While still at school, he collected and transcribed fifty-four rules of etiquette which govern in good society. A few of the best rules of behavior compiled by young George were as follows:

**#1**—Every time you are in the company of others, you ought to show some sign of respect to those present.

**#7**—Stay away from people who constantly speak about other people behind their back. Do not get into the habit of prying into the private life of any person.

**#9**—If you visit someone who is sick, do not try to play the physician unless you have training as a doctor. Always speak the truth plainly, using the Bible as your guide. A sick or lonely person should not be told a false report about their condition. False hope breeds misery.

**#13**—Do not start arguments at the dinner table. Good humor makes any meal a wonderful feast.

**#15**—Respect your elders at all times. Permit them the first chance to speak when in their company.

**#28**—If you care to develop a good name and reputation, be sure to choose companions that have godly character; for it is better to be alone than in bad company.

#33—Do not envy the blessings of others. God gives to all that honor Him more than they deserve.

At this period of his life, George grew up rapidly into a tall and fit youth, and by practicing himself in all kinds of athletic exercises became noted for his agility and strength. A place is still pointed out at Fredericksburg, where, when a boy, he threw a stone across the Rappahannock River. He was also a fine horseman. A story is told that when only ten years old, he mounted a beautiful but vicious colt, which belonged to his mother and which no one could ride. The colt reared and plunged and ran, but the young horseman kept his seat. At last the animal made a furious plunge, struck his head against a wall, and fell dead. His companions were all frightened. What would Mrs. Washington say to the killing of her fine colt? Going to the house, George said to his mother, "Your sorrel colt is dead, Mother; I killed him." Then he told his mother just how it had happened.

Mrs. Washington was very upset at the loss of her colt, but after a few moments she said, "I am very sorry to lose my colt, but I am very glad to have a son who is not afraid to speak the truth."

When our hero was fourteen years of age, arrangements were made by his brother Lawrence for him to enter the navy as a midshipman. His mother at first consented to let him go, but after his trunks had been packed and the time came to say good-by, she was so deeply distressed that he gave up the idea and returned to school.

For the next two years, he devoted himself chiefly to the study of mathematics. He made a special study of land surveying, which in those days was a very important profession. He learned the "highest processes of the art," and spared himself neither trouble nor fatigue to become proficient. He made surveys in the neighborhood and kept field books in which notes and plots were entered with great neatness. "Nothing," says the historian Irving, "was left half done, or done in a hurried or slovenly manner. The habit of mind thus cultivated continued throughout life; so that however

complicated his tasks and overwhelming his cares, he found time to do everything and to do it well."

In 1747, George left school and went to live with his brother Lawrence at the family estate at Mount Vernon. The latter had married Anne, the daughter of Hon. William Fairfax, brother of Lord Fairfax, and had settled on his estate upon the banks of the Potomac River. This estate he called Mount Vernon in honor of his beloved admiral.

While living with his brother, George was constantly in the company of the most intelligent and refined people, and by this association the manners of the home-bred boy received the stately polish of those colonial times. As Lawrence Washington was a member of the House of Burgesses and also adjutant-general of the district, there were statesmen as well as soldiers visiting at Mount Vernon. Their conversation relating to government and military affairs must have made a deep impression upon the mind of the thoughtful and manly boy.

When Washington was about sixteen, he was hired by Lord Fairfax to survey his lands beyond the Blue Ridge. These



lands had been taken up by lawless settlers, or “squatters,” and Lord Fairfax now desired to survey the vast region and bring the whole under his own control. Though Washington was only a youth, he possessed the necessary vigor, courage, and ability to perform the task, and very soon the teenager was ready to begin the difficult undertaking.

In March 1748, Washington set out on horseback accompanied by George William Fairfax, a nephew of Lord Fairfax. They entered the Valley of Virginia through Ashby’s Gap, a pass through the Blue Ridge, which then formed the western boundary of Virginia settlements. Here they found a beautiful region extending from the Blue Ridge on the east to the North Mountain, a spur of the Alleghanies, on the west, and watered by the beautiful Shenandoah river, which means in the Indian tongue “Daughter of the Stars.” In his diary Washington dwells with delight upon the magnificent forests and fertile lands of this region.

The travelers first stopped at a kind of lodge where the steward of Lord Fairfax lived, about twelve miles from the town of Winchester. From there they followed the course of the Shenandoah for many miles. Usually they would camp out in the open air, but sometimes they would be invited to share the scanty fare of the woodman’s cabin.

When, at last, having turned northward, they reached the Potomac, they found it so swollen by heavy rains that it was not fordable. Procuring a canoe, they crossed over in it, swimming their horses. They then traveled in a pouring rain forty miles up the river to the home of a Colonel Cresap. Here Washington saw for the first time an Indian war dance. A party of warriors appeared at the settlement and were induced by Colonel Cresap to dance for the amusement of his guests. The horrid appearance of the wild warriors and their terrible yells and whoops made a deep impression upon Washington, as he tells us in his diary.

Several weeks were now spent by the young explorers in the mountains of Frederick County, surveying lands and marking off the boundaries of farms. The weather was stormy and

their trials were many. Once, the straw in which Washington was sleeping caught fire and he was awakened just in time to escape being burnt. Again, their tent blew down and they were driven out into the pitiless rain. In a letter to one of his friends, Washington, wrote: "I have not slept above three or four nights in a bed, but after walking all day have lain down before the fire upon a little straw or fodder or a bear skin, whichever was to be had, with man, wife, and children, like dogs and cats; and happy is he who gets the berth nearest the fire."

On one occasion, Washington and his traveling companion nearly froze to death on their way back to Mount Vernon. They had built a raft and began floating down the river, dodging chunks of ice that had already begun to form on the surface. As the two approached a tiny island, their raft broke up and they were forced to swim to the nearby shore through the freezing cold water. They could not start a fire and were only able to stay alive that night by climbing up and down trees to keep their body temperature from growing too cold.

About the middle of April, Washington was again at Mount Vernon. For wages he had received each day a doubloon (between \$15 and \$16). He had done his work so well that Lord Fairfax secured for him the appointment as public surveyor. His surveys were now recorded in the county offices, and some of the lines run by him remain unchanged to this day.

The description of the land possessions given by the two young men was so pleasing to Lord Fairfax that he moved across the Blue Ridge and took up his residence at the lodge, known afterwards as "Greenway Court." The fine manor house which he planned was never built, however, but the old stone house in which the steward had lived served for the entertainment of his guests. Here Washington was always welcome, and here too he indulged in hunting and other sports of the forest. Lord Fairfax was a man of culture and varied experience and it is probable that Washington



derived both pleasure and profit from the companionship of his lordship.

Washington followed the occupation of surveying for three years and found that it paid him well, for there were then few surveyors for the vast tracts of country then being thrown open to adventurous settlers. The virtues of diligence and zeal were planted into the heart of Washington at an early age by his mother and by godly companions. The Book of Proverbs, chapter ten, rang true in the life of young George. "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

Throughout the beautiful valley, there are still homes which were built during colonial times that claim to have sheltered Washington when yet a young surveyor.

## CHAPTER TWO

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# The Ambassador

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Meanwhile, some of the most enterprising men in Virginia had formed a plan to settle the vast region west of the Alleghanies. You remember that both the English and the French claimed the country from the Great Lakes to the Ohio River. The French claim was based upon the discovery of the Mississippi by Marquette and Joliet in 1673. According to an unwritten law of nations, France had a right to claim not only the lands bordering upon the Mississippi, but also those touched by its tributary streams.

To oppose this claim, the English decided to purchase this disputed territory from the Indians. In 1744, a treaty had been made at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, between commissioners from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the Six Iroquois Indian tribes. By this treaty, the Indians gave up—for the sum of four hundred pounds—all rights to the land west of the Alleghanies, which region, they said, had been conquered by their forefathers.

It is true that the treaty and purchase did take place, but it is just as certain that the Six Nations or tribes at that time possessed not a foot of land west of the Alleghanies.

The time had now come for this great region to be settled. Both France and England began to make known their shadowy claims to it, and each of these nations prepared to outmaneuver the other by taking possession of as much land as possible.

In 1749, to gain a foothold in that country and to obtain wealth by its trade, an association called the “Ohio Company,” was chartered, and five hundred thousand acres of land west of the Alleghanies was granted to it by the king of England. Both Lawrence and Augustine Washington were