

## George Washington's Early Life and Career

- He was the oldest child of a second marriage – with two older brothers from the first.
- Little is known of Washington's childhood, and it remains the most poorly understood part of his life – adding to the perception that he was ALWAYS a grown leader.
- When George was eleven years old, His father Augustine died, making him the man of the house overnight. His mother was demanding throughout his life.
- Little is known about George's formal education. Wealthy planters often sent their sons to England, but the death of his father made schooling abroad an impossibility for George.



**Mary Ball Washington**

- He excelled in mathematics and learned the basics of surveying. But he was not taught Latin or Greek like many gentlemen's sons. Although he tried as an older man to learn French, he never learned a foreign language. Nor did he attend college. His formal education ended around the age of 15.



## Lawrence Washington

- George began to spend a great deal of time with his older half brother, Lawrence, at HIS BROTHER'S home, Mount Vernon. Lawrence became a mentor to George, tutoring him in his studies, teaching him social graces, and helping to introduce him into society.
  - Throughout his life, Washington regarded his education as defective. He consciously made up for some of what he did not learn in school through reading and study on his own. Over the years he amassed a large and diverse library, and in his later years he subscribed to several newspapers. He became a skilled and prolific writer. Perhaps as a result of his lack of formal education he strongly believed in the value of a good education and left money in his will for establishing a school in Alexandria, Virginia, as well as for establishing a national university.
- In 1746 Lawrence proposed that George Washington join the British navy. Although George was excited at the idea of a military career, his mother refused her consent, and George was spared the harsh discipline of a life at sea.
  - Young Washington applied himself to surveying, a valuable skill in a colony where land was being settled constantly. In 1748 he joined a surveying expedition to western Virginia at the invitation of Lawrence's neighbors, the powerful Fairfax family. The next year the Fairfaxes helped secure him an appointment as a county surveyor. By the age of 17 he was well on his way to a successful and profitable career. In an effort to establish himself as a member of the gentry class, he worked hard, saved his money, and bought unclaimed land.

## Sally Fairfax

- In 1751 he accompanied his brother Lawrence, who was suffering from tuberculosis, on a voyage to the British island colony of Barbados. It would be the only time he ever left the United States. While in Barbados, Washington saw some of the most extensive fortifications in British America and socialized with military men, experiences that probably stimulated his interest in military service. He also contracted smallpox. Though he recovered quickly, the illness **may** have rendered him sterile.



- Lawrence died in 1752, and shortly thereafter George inherited Mount Vernon. He also obtained Lawrence's place in the Virginia militia and received a major's commission -- the first step in his military career.



## Mount Vernon

- Washington spent the next few years fighting in the French and Indian War, getting valuable military experience, and gaining international recognition for his efforts which were largely UNsuccessful. He was only 22.



- Although very young, he became the most experienced native military officer in Virginia. In 1759, upon marrying Martha Dandridge Custis, a young widow of one of the wealthiest men in the colony, he retired to his plantation. She had two children, a boy and a girl, whom Washington loved as his own.

**A modern interpretation of what Martha Washington looked like.**

- George Washington spent the years between 1759 and 1775 as a gentleman farmer at Mount Vernon. He worked constantly to improve and expand the mansion house and its surrounding plantation. He established himself as an innovative farmer, who switched from tobacco to wheat as his main cash crop in the 1760s. In an effort to improve his farming operation, he diligently experimented with new crops, fertilizers, crop rotation, tools, and livestock breeding. He also expanded the work of the plantation to include flour milling and commercial fishing in an effort to make Mount Vernon a more profitable estate.

- By the time of his death in 1799, he had expanded the plantation from 2,000 to 8,000 acres consisting of five farms, with more than 3,000 acres under cultivation.
- He was elected to the House of Burgesses in 1758 (after being twice defeated) and served several terms. He viewed the growing disputes between Great Britain and her American colonies with deep concern. He was not a political firebrand, stirring orator, or deal maker; but he impressed his peers as a modest dependable man of strength and good sense.



- In the fall of 1774, Washington was chosen as one of seven Virginia representatives to the Continental Congress. Upon his arrival in Philadelphia, other delegates immediately recognized him as a man of patriotic views and sound judgment. At six feet three inches tall, he towered over the other delegates; and he had an athletic grace and commanding presence. Although Washington spoke very little in Congress, many of the delegates noticed what one called his, easy, soldier-like air...
- In June 1775, Congress commissioned George Washington to take command of the Continental Army besieging the British in Boston. He wrote home to Martha that he expected to return safe to you in the fall. The command kept him away from Mount Vernon for more than 8 years.



And the rest...is History...to be continued...

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