

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

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DISCOVER THE REAL GEORGE WASHINGTON **EXHIBITION OVERVIEW**

Introduction

George Washington's life and legacy had a profound effect on his peers, colleagues, friends, family, and the nation at large, and have withstood the test of time. However, does the public really know and understand the real George Washington? This fascinating exhibition reveals the man behind the myth, with the hope that the strength of his character, intellect, courage, and wisdom will continue to remind us of who we are as a people and a nation.

The exhibition opens with Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait of George Washington. Visitors also will have the opportunity to view an introductory video produced by The History Channel and a timeline of significant events that are featured throughout the exhibition.

George Washington's Mount Vernon

This section of the exhibition presents a large-scale model of Mount Vernon that illustrates the Mansion, outbuildings, gardens, vistas, wharf, and views of the Potomac River. A sophisticated lighting technique illuminates key buildings and components of the estate. Surrounding the model is a series of large-format photographs that reveal the scale, symmetry and awe-inspiring beauty of Washington's carefully planned estate.

In addition, a touchscreen interactive allows visitors to explore a map of the United States featuring cities, towns and other landmarks named after George Washington and his Mount Vernon home.

A panel in this section briefly relates the story of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, America's first national preservation organization, which rescued George Washington's estate from total destruction in the 1850s. Included are images of a deteriorating Mount Vernon and Ann Pamela Cunningham, who spearheaded efforts to save Mount Vernon by founding the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in 1853.

An Ambitious Youth

As a young man, Washington possessed energy, ambition, a strong work ethic, and an adventuresome spirit. In this section, visitors can view a life-size model of Washington as a 19 year-old red-haired surveyor from Virginia just prior to the French and Indian War. Over 6 feet 2 inches tall, he would have weighed about 175 pounds. Also on display in this section is a variety of surveying tools, including Washington's personal compass and a spyglass.

In addition, visitors can explore Washington's career as a colonial officer in the French and Indian War through a model of Fort Mifflin and a journal recounting his experiences in the war.

A Man of Firm Beliefs

Washington was a deeply spiritual man and a life-long member of the Anglican Church, known after the Revolution as the Protestant Episcopal Church. As a young man in the French and Indian War, he pleaded with Colonial authorities to provide a chaplain for his soldiers. When no one was appointed, Washington and his fellow officers actually led Sunday services. During the Revolution, he encouraged his army to attend church. He strongly believed that political and religious freedom went hand-in-hand, and encouraged all to embrace religious tolerance, not just Christianity, for the new nation.

This section presents a full-size replica of George Washington's pew at Pohick Church, where visitors are invited to sit and watch a video about his views on religion. The Washington family Bible also is featured in this section.

A Dauntless Warrior

At the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia on June 15, 1775, Washington unanimously was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. He led this army for eight years, and against all odds, eventually achieved victory over Great Britain, the world's most powerful military force at that time. Washington proved himself a leader of character. Courageous, determined, inventive, and selfless, he was devoted to his men. With whole-hearted commitment, he led his troops to one of history's most remarkable come-from-behind victories.

Visitors can take a close-up look at a full-size figure of Washington at age 45 on his horse, Blueskin, in a snow-covered forest at Valley Forge. Also on display is a collection of 18th-century weaponry, a selection of military manuals, a cannon from Fort Ticonderoga, and a video on Washington's wartime espionage.

The Mastermind of Mount Vernon

As a farmer and businessman, Washington utilized Mount Vernon as a proving ground to accomplish two goals: to advance his own private business interests and to experiment with methods that also would help the young nation grow and develop. He sought out and employed the latest technologies, introduced the mule to American agriculture, established a thriving fishing industry on the Potomac River, experimented with hundreds of crop rotations and fertilizers, opened a whiskey distillery, developed a treading barn for separating wheat from straw, and sold bushels of flour from his "high-tech" gristmill to markets as far away as the West Indies and Portugal.

Objects in this section include models of Washington's gristmill, his innovative 16-sided treading barn, and a reproduction still. A video filmed on site at the gristmill shows its ingenious operation.

A Troubled Slaveholder

Washington, unlike some of his peers and fellow plantation owners, did not envision slavery as an integral part of America's bright future. Although Washington made provisions to free his own slaves in his will, he was unable to free the Custis slaves brought to the marriage by Martha Dandridge Custis. By Virginia law, her slaves would

be divided among her four grandchildren at her death. Because the two groups of slaves had intermarried, the emancipation proved to be bittersweet. Some family members were set free, while others remained in bondage.

This section of the exhibition features biographies of some of the Mount Vernon slaves, as well as objects they used, including farm tools, gardening implements, kitchen objects, and personal artifacts from the archaeological excavations of the slave quarters. Visitors also can view a video about slavery featuring scholars and descendants of Washington's slaves.

My Dearest

Long before she became our nation's first "First Lady," Martha Dandridge Custis was George Washington's "dearest." Through 40 years of marriage, she cheered and supported him in every endeavor. Martha Washington was a strong lady and a skillful leader in her own right, as well. Her enthusiastic and patriotic actions in support of the Revolutionary cause, as well as her wisdom and good sense in assuming the challenging role of "First Lady," had a stabilizing effect on her husband, and behind closed doors her opinions possessed a power that should not be underestimated.

This section includes reproductions of Martha Washington's wedding dress and slippers, as well as original pieces of her jewelry. Original china, silver, and glassware used by Martha Washington when entertaining guests also is on display.

Uneasy in the Mouth

His physical stature and stamina were exceptional, but his teeth most certainly were not. Despite all his efforts, Washington suffered through a lifetime of toothache. He hired the best dentists and spent a small fortune on dental care, but eventually accepted defeat.

Visitors will have the rare opportunity to take a close look at Washington's dentures in this section. The only surviving full set of dentures attributed to Washington, these false teeth are embedded in a lead base. Accompanying the dentures is a timeline demonstrating Washington's tooth loss and a History Channel video showing how the dentures would have been made.

The First President

After successfully presiding over the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Washington unanimously was elected the first president of the United States in 1789. During his two terms, he established important precedents and sought to rise above party politics to do what he thought would be in the country's long-term best interest.

The focal point of this section is a depiction of George Washington's inauguration on the balcony of New York City's Federal Hall, complete with life-size models of George Washington at age 57; Robert R. Livingston, Chancellor of New York who administered the Oath of Office; and Samuel Otis, Secretary of the Senate who held the Bible. Presidential dining is represented by china, cutlery, and wine glasses. Guests also can test their knowledge of presidential firsts at an interactive display.

Beloved Hero

On December 12, 1799, Washington inspected his farms on horseback in inclement weather. Without changing his wet clothes, he sat down to dinner. The next morning, a cold, fever, and quinsy (a throat infection) overtook him, ultimately causing his death on

the evening of December 14 at the age of 67. Dr. James Craik (one of Washington's closest friends), Dr. Gustavus Brown, Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, Tobias Lear (his personal secretary), Christopher Sheels (his personal body servant), and several house servants were with Martha Washington at his bedside. Washington's unexpected death stunned the nation. For many months afterward, stricken mourners expressed their grief in mock funerals and heartfelt eulogies to the departed hero.

Objects in this section illustrate the public's fascination with the death of Washington, expressed through beautiful decorative objects. A small silver sarcophagus and memorial china are on display.

Discover the Real George Washington: New Views from Mount Vernon

July 1 through September 5, 2011

National Constitution Center in Philadelphia

Admission to *Discover the Real George Washington* is \$15 for adults and \$14 for seniors (ages 65 and up) and students. Children ages 12 and under and active military are FREE. Group rates also are available. Admission to the Center's main exhibition, *The Story of We the People*, including the award-winning theater production "Freedom Rising," is included. iPod audio tours cost an additional \$5. For ticket information, call 215.409.6700 or visit www.constitutioncenter.org.

Discover the Real George Washington: New Views from Mount Vernon was organized by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association and funded by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, a philanthropic organization founded in 1954 by the late media entrepreneur for whom it is named.

6abc is the official media partner. The exhibition was designed by MFM Design, Inc. and fabricated by Explus, Inc. The forensic figures of George Washington were created by StudioEIS. Visit www.DiscoverGeorgeWashington.org.